

WWJB?

(Who Would Jesus Bomb)

Undeleted Ramblings on Religion & Spirituality ...



KW Ibrahim

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Introduction

After writing *Opus Oil*, I wasn't sure what topic to cover next... religion, men and women, race, or miscellaneous topics – who did I want to tick off next? Actually, I don't want to annoy anyone... but unfortunately, that seems to be unavoidable.

After almost deciding to finish what I've been writing about men and women, it occurred that perhaps I should put that off ... for starters, there's very little upside in antagonizing my long suffering wife.

If the title of this book is not immediately self-evident, just think of the popular WWJD bracelets etc. and take it from there – it's no secret how I feel about organized religion in general.

This book has the word “undeleted” in its subtitle, referring to the fact that it is minimally edited. I've tried to *soften* some of the more “objectionable” thoughts, from when I wake up on the wrong side of the rock. This is more about feelings, than a book of “facts” about religious contradictions, history or archeology. Those subjects have been attempted in the Society for the Rational Study of Religion- a work in progress and a webpage.

These ramblings have been compiled over a period of about twenty years and some are a bit odd or embarrassing... big deal! It *is* subtitled undeleted, so there seemed no reason to delete anything, except for cases where I had changed my mind completely... which I think we all have the right to do.

Chapter - One

You don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to observe that the more extremist a man's religion is, the itchier his trigger finger tends to be... after all, he figures he's just sending you back to your maker.

The "Scriptures"... does that mean that the history of human kind is scripted? That's what they've told me. Fundamentalist Christians will not make you wear a veil or a burqa, but they have more subtle forms of mind control, that are just as effective.

I don't like to pray at the dinner table and never really have like too – it's too competitive an exercise around here. I think there are several parts to praying and it's not always what *you* hear that is most important. There is what people hear you say, what's going on in your subconscious and what you're thinking but not saying. What you don't say -- the "unspoken" -- that sometimes the most important part of the prayer. People "judge" the prayer on the "public" part alone and that's only part of it... they also judge it based on their opinion of how you rate "spiritually."

Most of us need religion or spirituality to get us through the hard times -- but do we need to be so intolerant and so sure that we're right and everybody else is wrong.

I see organized religion as the dark underbelly of spirituality, it is how TPTB control and frame the discussion. People are eager "to join" because the promises are great, the threats terrible and there are nice perks that come with the membership card.

I think that two of the greatest negative forces in the world, are fundamentalism and ultra-nationalism... wherever they occur. One of the forces or tools enabling them to reek havoc on humanity, is peer pressure, be it from; friends, family, compatriots or congregations. Whether we are children, adolescents or adults, we find it almost impossible to stand up to the threats of; shunning, isolation, ridicule or violence doled out by our peers. Please note, I said fundamentalism and ultra-

nationalism, not religion and nationalism -- those are usually a bit more benign. Peer pressure at it's least coercive makes us do things we're not thrilled about doing, but in it's more extreme forms we might do the unthinkable without thinking twice... mobs are ruled by this force.

I feel like I'm surrounded by a nation of people who are a lot like cult members. The nationalistic cult of "America the greatest country ever" and the religion of Jesus Christ and only Jesus Christ. I suppose there are many other nations based on cults... North Korea is one that comes to mind. I'm not saying that we're in their dismal league, but it's not saying much to proudly proclaim that you're better than that. In both cases, ultra-nationalism and mythology are used to control the masses, in our case we're fat, in their case their thin.

We're all in the middle of this mess, we're not looking down from heaven on this crazy world and saying look at this or look at that, isn't it interesting. How can any of us claim to be unbiased, when we're right smack in the middle of things? How can I, how can you?

I believe in religious freedom, but it loses something when it's imposed at gun point. I like old time gospel music more than the modern stuff because I can feel it in my bones.

Fundamentalist Christianity fits in well with laissez faire capitalism, as apparently it's all right to do almost anything as long as you're advancing the "noble cause." One of the causes was called "manifest destiny" in the 1800's and though that term is seldom used, now, the concept still seems very much in vogue. The ends justify the means and if you're not with them, you're against them and fair game for obliteration. The whole thing doesn't seem all that different from what you'd face, if you lived in Saudi Arabia and were not, at least outwardly-- a fundamentalist Muslim.

I guess I should take this opportunity, to disclose that I am an Arab American and as such may have certain biases... it would be nice if other authors, disclosed their backgrounds and potential biases as well. I see the Arab people as being strongly "encouraged" to "reform" and "end of word" conform to western values. Certain Western powers are doing their best to show the Arabs that they will have to shave their mustaches if they want to survive, or the crusaders will shave their beards off entirely. The intent is to demonstrate that anyone opposing the super powers of the west will be sheared like so many sheep. The west, led at this time in history by extremists and neocons, will go to any length to get its way. In the future when the

west has assumably prevailed, it might moderate and address some of the mistakes they've made along the way. During this period of crusade, however, it's a no holds barred fight!

On my death bed, I'm not sure that I'd want a bunch of people praying over me? I might be happier alone, just me and my maker, without all that pressure to repent, confess, join "the team" or whatever. Then again, I won't really know until the time comes... and it may not even be an issue.

It's ironic that I am "encouraged" by my wife's church to be our families "spiritual leader", with the caveat that to hold that "title", I must comply with their spiritual agenda. I to see them basically as the dominant world cult and something of a criminal enterprise. As a skeptical, free thinking individual, I am unacceptable to the "cult."

As an olive branch, I am invited to attend Bible study where I am offered the role of devils advocate and granted the privilege of "being saved" with the help of these diligent prayer warriors. Meanwhile I am told that my prayers aren't sincere... there's even a billboard outside of our town stating that, "a prayer to anyone but Jesus is a prayer not heard." Usually I pray for the usual "important" stuff, but this morning I prayed that I don't eat the German chocolate cake in the cabinet.

My "favorite" religions are the ancient, long deceased ones... they are less likely to be filled with zealots intent on causing mischief and mayhem when they don't get their way.

You claim that certain people have a "direct line" to God and that their prayers are answered more often than most other peoples. That may or may not be true, but are you implying that person, is more cherished by God? You may not agree, but that's how it looks to me and it makes me sad. It evokes sadness, because next --you'll impose your will, morality and politics on the rest of us, because your people have a direct line to God and "we" don't. I'm tired of all you prayer warriors... why don't you pray in the closet more and in public a bit less? Unfortunately, I can hear the refrain now, "they're not better, just better off."

You boast that your prayers are "custom made" and powerful, but they sound quite repetitious to me. They usually seem to start something like, "dear Lord, we just want to thank you ... blah, blah, blah, etc., etc. etc., and yada, yada, yada." I wouldn't be surprised if God hears the heartfelt, but silent prayers of regular folks as often as those of your prayer warriors. I wouldn't be surprised if God's as

moved by them, as by the flamboyant public prayers we so often hear at church, Bible studies, meals and other gatherings. Okay... I shouldn't be judgmental, maybe I'm just jealous that no one ever asks me to pray for them... admittedly, I don't do it with much flair or pizzazz.

We go to Bible study and plan to clean elderly women's gutters and everyone feels great afterwards. We've done our good works, our random acts of kindness... meanwhile I wonder if they are trying to make up for their rabid support for our bomber jets and Tomahawk missiles that are killing strangers on the other side of the world. Somehow, I think they have that rationalized down to a "T." We cleaned the gutters and I heard the word "awesome" again, in fact I heard it a couple times yesterday. My Christian friends say "awesome!" regularly, it seems to sum up their feelings I guess. Cleaning the gutters was fine, it's always good to do something like that, but what I'd rather do is help suffering Arab children. The problem is, I could be arrested for supporting "terrorists" if I give money to almost any Arab charity. It matters not, that the wealthy people of the west give billions to crush these the same innocent children. It comes from taxpayers, oligarchs, moguls and millions of regular people who donate to the crusade to control the holy land and indeed the entire world.

I've heard all the fancy talk, I've heard all the lies, my eyes have rained a thousand times, I've had words whispered in my ears, but I've never had true unconditional love. Not from my wife, children, parents, not even from my dogs and it seems not even from the God you talk about. Maybe I believe in a different God, or maybe I accept that God expects some basic civility and obedience from me... I prostrate myself and comply. I want it, I've come close, but maybe I'm not worth it, or maybe I'm just too human to receive or give "agape" love.

"And I'll stand my ground..." Tom Petty. You can slander, accuse, beat and kill me, church members and the state can too, but in the end, you can only ground me up and spit me out once... at least I think you can.

Just as I am on a different wavelength than most of my relatives and friends and have to speak carefully for fear of offending their sensitivities, I am similarly on a different wavelength than people of other ethnicities and just about every one else. I have to hold my tongue, although it's not unusual for that muscle to get away from me, I go to Bible studies and feel like I'm at a quilting bee. I would rather go to a religious study with people who don't mind diverse opinions and who can remain friends even when the theological shit hits the fan.

I will not join a church that all but declares that God is a Republican, Democrat, independent or anything else.

Jesus said something about one having to be willing to leave his mother and father if they wanted to follow him. So, what about parents? Would it be proper for them to abandon their spouses and children to take up the cross and follow his path? Does it mean that only single people should be hard core followers, or is that simply classic cult recruitment talk?

“Although his mind is not for rent, don’t put him down as arrogant... Exit the warrior, today’s Tom Sawyer... he gets high on you, on the friction of the day.”... Rush

One side plies you with drugs and alcohol, the other uses pitch-in dinners, both assault your brain with persuasive arguments, implied threats and promises of glory, grandeur or revelations. They are all in it for themselves my friend, they are in it for their gain and you are their currency.

“Like a stranger on a bus, trying to make his way home... like a holy rolling stone, no body calling on the phone.”... Joan Osborne.

Secular versus religious, faith based versus reason... religion almost always wins. At least until the leadership achieves its goals or their excesses become unbearable. Then the more “rational” non-sectarian forces hold sway for a while, until their excesses become too much to bear or some crisis allows the moralists to again grab the reins.

The military says that x% of American soldiers serving in Iraq say they have mental problems while active, and after six months of being released, the number reportedly rises to 17%. Following years of being praised and called a hero for going around the world killing bad guys, they come home to a place where killing people is no longer a marketable skill... so what do you expect?

Societies that devote so much of their resources and wealth to killing foreigners and to glamorizing violence in the media are indeed sick. Women seem to love men in uniforms and men love to wear them and act macho. Our cultural institutions officially (or unofficially) preach the love of Jesus, but instead of prayer and peaceful pursuit of justice for all, we unleash bombs and missiles on the “enemy” to secure our “national interests.” I guess Americans feel qualified to decide who their lord and savior would bomb?

What does it mean that “the meek will inherit the earth?” It looks more and more as if women, who to some seem meek, are inheriting the earth. I prefer to interpret “meek” as meaning peace loving people?

The stories of barbaric punishments in the Middle East, Pakistan, Afghanistan etc. are utterly repulsive. This week a story about a young woman who was gang raped as punishment for something her brother did. Is this an isolated incident by a rogue, vicious tribal chief or council, or is it the norm there? Either way, it should be stopped and those guilty should be held accountable. Please cousins! Stop mistreating your people, especially your lovely women... I pray that God will guide you towards a more gentle path and bless you for it.

The Sunnis remind me of fundamentalist protestants in general and the Wahabis remind me of the extremists. Japan reminds me of the Mormons, both are somewhat cult like, but aren't all religions cultish? Then again, I consider Christianity, Judaism and Islam cult like as well... I wonder why -- of the tens of thousands of Japanese who come to the U.S. on business, so relatively few stay? Maybe it's difficult to break the hold of their native land, maybe it's because their homeland is prosperous, or because of government restrictions... maybe I don't know why it is and maybe I don't know what this has to do with the rest of this paragraph?

You guys like the idea of crushing the Iraqi Sunnis, because it's right in line with your goals and world view... democracy, cheap oil and the Judeo/Christian way of life. It doesn't matter that the original reason for busting down the doors were Iraq's supposed WMDs. You would have been quite happy to wage war for any reason the “boss” gave you.

The president tells us that we're “all in this together... we're a team, stay on course”, I think it's mostly based on lies and double speak. It's no surprise the extremist leaders are on board and enthusiastically doing their integral part... after all they're the best at getting the people to believe stories and play follow the leader. Not that the church doesn't do some good work along the way... but it reminds me of this quote:

I'm half Arab and rejoice in that, although I'm opposed to a number of things being done by Arabs. I'm also half American and rejoice in that equally, I am also not proud of some of the things American's have done. Most of my immediate family on both sides, has been somewhat non-observant of their religions and I

think they are mostly agnostic. I believe strongly in God, although I will admit to periods of doubt. Despite this, I won't shrink in saying that I am every bit as spiritual as people in the "national corporate churches." These people agitate for changes that benefit their world view and claim to have a direct line to God. They pray and bray loudly and claim that the rest of us are illegitimate and damned, but I find little to be attracted to, in their grandiose, prosperity based religions.

I keep hearing that human morality only makes sense if there's a God. Otherwise, you say, man has no reason not to pillage and plunder. Well first of all I believe in God and secondly, I find your logic ridiculous. There are plenty of reasons to follow the golden rule regardless of one's theology or lack of it. Chaos, anarchy and war, tend to be bad for children and other people. In fact these things are only "beneficial" to a few people for a short time and then the tables usually turn and the benefits reverse themselves. I think that your argument that morality only makes sense if there's a God, is just another red herring you've inserted in the debate to falsely claim the moral high ground, even as you use violence to achieve your desires.

On July 9, 2005, the news radio reported that a Pakistani woman had her feet cut off, because her relatives thought she was promiscuous. First of all, those responsible should get very long prison terms for their cruel, unjust barbarity. Secondly if it takes the west to destroy such barbarity, so be it, but it would be a heck of a lot better if the countries that are afflicted with such cruel traditions reform themselves.

The west should also change for the better, after all, we are also afflicted with a major problem of violence against women and children. Ours may not be sanctioned the same way by society, none the less, it occurs with great regularity... does that mean that powerful people don't care? I don't know if lowering men's legal status as I believe we've done has helped or hurt our domestic violence problem, but some men seem even angrier than they might be if they weren't being abused by the system. Has elevating women above men in custody and property battles helped women or hurt them? While it may be enriching women, it may also be creating the conditions for greater violence against them. Is the solution more penalties for men? Maybe there should be more penalties for men who lash out violently, or at least better protection for women, but the legal climate that allows women to take children and money and leave men broke and alone should be reformed.

Violent movies, lyrics, TV and video games both reflect and perpetuate the brutality occurring in our society. I have no doubt that it would be beneficial to society, to control this violent content at least as much as control sexual content. Men and women who commit, or aid and abet violence and sexual abuse against anyone, especially children, should serve very long prison sentences. It makes sense to me that sentences for non-violent crimes should be shortened and sentences for violent crimes lengthened. The only exception would be for serious white-collar crimes, where the criminals often go to “club fed” and then make no restitution... these offenders sentences should also be lengthened and financial restitution to their victims made mandatory.

You have stolen peoples land time after time, sometimes they mount a vigorous defense and sometimes they don't. The most radical Muslims, have taken the fight to your shores, something you have not often seen. You have no concern for your crimes, in fact you won't admit to even the slightest possibility that you have wronged the Arabs. You emphasize that only “they” have committed crimes against and you bomb them without mercy... yet your book commands that “thou shalt not kill.” That commandment is but a very minor inconvenience, as it is rationalized, explained away and “put into the proper context”, by your politicians and clergymen. You never admit to being invaders and occupiers, after all, you can always point to locals, who have invited you in to their country. In there countries at large, they are often called collaborators and opportunists and you reward them well for their efforts. If you were sincere in your nation building, you would be straightening out Africa as well. In your “wisdom”, you point to the need to use a more measured approach on the dark continent, where horrible atrocities against women and children occur there on a daily basis. There are atrocities done there that would be considered barbaric even by the worst regimes in the Middle East, yet those are the nations that you bomb and steal from... because they have oil and they will not submit to you.

This all points to the Middle East wars as being fueled by religious ideology and greed for oil. The Brits who so loudly proclaim their democratic tradition, were among the profiteers of the African slave trade, fought a war to allow their drug lords to addict millions of Chinese to Opium and have fought numerous colonial wars to enrich themselves with much of the worlds resources and wealth. Did you think the chickens would never come home to roost? Do you expect that you will never reap what you have sown? Are you alone immune from cosmic justice?

Why don't I go to church? Well, let's see... I'm surrounded by religious fundamentalist and there are daily reports of violence caused by extremists. Why would I want to take the vitamins they are dispensing? I'd rather reflect, write, garden or daydream on Sunday morning, than sit and be fed corn flakes fortified with dogma and superstitions about grand designs for conquest and world domination. I believe this is an abomination practiced by all the major religions and no doubt some minor ones as well.

Bumper stickers I saw on a slightly beat up car at Walmart today... "Born okay the first time." and "God is too big to fit in any one religion." I walked another twenty yards and saw a nice shiny, newer car. It had a Jesus fish on it and a yellow support the troops ribbon magnet on it. Follow the money... you'll see that it's more profitable to follow the leader than march to your own drummer. Most people seem to be natural followers, but everyone I know would be offended if told they act like undiscerning robots.

Chapter - Two

In prehistory, it was the strong and clever who survived and spread their seed, the weak man might have a few children of which only one or two if any would survive, while the formidable man could have fifty children, ensuring that his genes were passed on. In some places, monogamy was catching on, and a man might have five or ten children with one woman and perhaps one or two on the side.

You criticize anyone who “sits on the fence”, but I think fence sitting has its place. It’s fine if it keeps folks from murdering each other on the killing “field.” The slur “fence sitter” has been used effectively many times, to get people fired up for various causes. It’s a lot like calling someone “yellow” or a coward, it touches a raw nerve, insults a fellow’s sense of manliness and pushes the peer pressure button. Lets sit on the fence for a while... it’s a good place to watch the crazies murder each other on those killing fields that they adore. Just keep your powder dry, because sooner or later they’ll need a new game and a new opponent.

Yes Virginia, people are less likely to kill each other over what might be, than over what they’ve been convinced is the absolute and irrevocable truth... and no Virginia, there is not a Santa Clause, not even the ones the grown ups believe in.

There might still be official “tolerance” for people of all religions, but they will likely be without much influence, that will be held by those who embrace the nationalistic, manifest destiny of Judeo Christianity. Not that these power brokers live Christ like lives... unless Jesus was a militaristic crusader. Life in America by this time will resemble something in between the world described in the book The Handmaiden, a Geico commercial and a Norman Rockwell painting. The goyum will be self indulgent, patriotic, fat and content inside their homes made of the latest plastics and wood “by-products.” The elite, are just as brainwashed, but not quite as chubby, instead resplendent and dazzling with their artificially bronzed skin, appreciation for art and the other finer things of life.

How strange it is, that the same God that would allow for so many terrible personal tragedies, such as; murder, rape, torture, being burned alive, disfigurement and so many more, is the same God that brings comfort to the victims and victims families. There is something very peculiar about God or human beings. How can the one that allows these tragedies and reputedly has the

power to stop them, be the same one we go to for comfort in the aftermath of such sadness or cruel violations of innocent lives? Life is strange indeed!

We are the most loving, caring species on earth, to our loved ones and the most terrible and cold blooded species on the planet, to our “enemies” and competitors. You can take your fancy talk about religion and stuff it, because time and time again, our species proves its ruthlessness. Once peer pressure and the mob mentality are invoked or fired up, by persuasive orators or writers, using nationalism, religion or ideology, blood flows like a stream.

“I firmly believe that there is a force in the Universe greater than us because it's too depressing to think that we could be on top. I also believe that whatever that force may be, it has nothing to do with organized religion.”... Walliac

Everyone is responsible, everyone must be a shepherd, no one should be a sheep...Quran?

I don't see Jesus as being a warrior and certainly not a killer. Yes, he cleaned out the temple and it's prophesized that he's coming back to rule the nations with a rod of iron, but when he was on earth, his most aggressive recorded act, was driving the moneychangers out of the temple. He didn't kill them, he drove them out. If you want to be like Jesus, maybe you should drive the Pharisees from the temple, but not be a trained, programmed, enthusiastic killer.

Your religion is perverted by those who say *you* are of God, but the other guy isn't. These are simply hateful code words that encourage people to subjugate those who will not join their “team.” The Golden Rule and phrases like Love your enemy do not mean, imply or authorize you to kill him. You may protect yourself, Jesus once even told his apostle to buy a sword, but he didn't instruct him to kill anyone. Talk to your adversary, sit down with him, debate him, try to reconcile, look for common ground and even seek his friendship. Be on guard - but don't be bent on violence and don't invade his lands. I see the neocon president as the antithesis of Christ... a man who managed to avoid combat, but is willing to have his surrogates kill, kill, kill.

Religion is regularly used to justify violence... in fact violence and organized religion is to me almost synonymous. Certainly in this time of war, religionists are among the chief proponents of violence. It is at such times, that they reduce “religion” to dogmatic formulas, instead of elevating it to a spiritual journey. Religious leaders equate spirituality to zealotry without conscience and give

persuasive sermons about God requiring the faithful to kill in his? name. You manipulate the people with peer pressure, scare tactics and promises of everlasting life, in order to make them kill and dispossess others. If a man doesn't agree with the bloodthirsty agenda, he is shunned, coerced, or much worse ...

According to a show on the history channel today called "Hell: The Devil's Domain", Judaism doesn't specify that there's a hell, although they typically believe that evil doers get their just deserts. Islam, the show said, teaches that evil doers go to hell, but that even the majority of them end up in paradise, after a suitable period of punishment. The show inferred that Buddhists also believe in a period in hell, but not for eternity. Then it got to Christianity and here we are told of a religion where the bad folks get tormented eternally. This is a great way to keep the troops in line and that's what religious folks of any "true" faith are... troops. I wonder if Herbert W. Armstrong's teachings are more accurate than those of the current "church", he taught that for most of the sinners who go to hell, it would not be for eternity.

If God made us all look the same on the outside, we would still be different on the inside. If we are different on the inside, what does it matter how we look on the outside? Anyway, we should not judge each other, but since we tend to, it's better to judge based on what's on the inside not the outside.

We have our own madras's they are primarily the extremist Christian schools that have sprouted up by the hundreds, or thousands all over the country... although public schools, also occasionally fit into this category. I doubt that American "Madras's" are as hard-core as those in Pakistan or the Middle East, but they also teach religious bigotry as well as the glorification of militaristic power and hegemony. I hear that the Air Force Academy might be on the madras path as well, in addition to sexual harassment and abuse of female cadets, there are reports that extremist Christians are attempting to hijack the entire academy. Here our youth is not taught how to blow one's self up to kill the "enemy", instead they are taught how to be more efficient killers, by "heroically" dropping bombs on "targets" from miles up in the sky. The Naval Academy has it's own favorite way to kill the "enemy", they fire cruise missiles from a hundred miles away... sanitary, hygienic and like a video game... you never even see blood, much less have to wash it off your hands.

Al Jezeerah? It's biased, but so is our media, especially Fox, but all media is biased. You get to a whole new level of bias, when you get your news from the 700 Club and other extremist religious TV "news" shows. On these networks, you are

fed; information, prophecy and talk shows at all hours of the day and night, spewing religious intolerance and news that is as biased as Al Jezeerah. I have not seen debate between people of different points of view on American fundamentalist TV... that's worse than Al Jezeerah! Eventually they might add that to their programming, at least it would make them look less biased.

“So to my old headmaster (and to anyone who cares): before I'm through, I'd like to say my prayers - I don't believe you: you had the whole damn thing all wrong - He's not the kind you have to wind up on Sundays. Well you can excommunicate me on my way to Sunday school and have all the Bishops harmonize these lines - How do you dare to tell me that I'm my Father's son when that was just an accident of Birth...” – Jethro Tull

Instant karma? Do we just need to understand the principles of Karma and the Golden Rule, or do we need a personal savior? It seems that the majority of Americans are happiest with Jesus as their personal savior, when given the choice he'd probably be the number one choice of people everywhere. But does that mean that “the church” is his church?

“Better recognize, your brother's everyone you meet”... John Lennon.

Some people are all about crime and punishment... if you weren't doing things their way, they consider it a crime and seek to punish you one way or another.

Neither the president nor the pastor have convinced me of a gosh darn thing... except that they'll do anything to get their way... to “win.”

Matthew (6:5-6) "Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray."... hmm?

Your moral authority over others, is derived from your punitive powers. You have the means to wreak havoc, injure, incarcerate or destroy people. Based on that, I have to acknowledge your punitive authority, but I don't accept your moral authority. It is too bad that you equate punitive power with moral superiority... in fact, I think you are morally bankrupt.

People who think that killing for a living is noble, should measure the costs, risks and consequences... in this life and beyond.

I agree that religion or spirituality are among the most important things in peoples lives. That is exactly why I am trying not to let other people decide what I should believe. These professionals have a long record of infighting, outfighting and chicanery.

Here's a Truck Stop Instead of St. Peters... R.E.M.

Who Would Jesus Bomb? Some folks seem to know, and certain leaders are anxious to play God, apparently with their constituents approval. Hopefully - somehow, maybe this mess will end peacefully, with a positive outcome and not with the mega-violence that some predict.

Mom was raised Christian and dad Muslim... by the time the met, I think they were both agnostics. We were raised in the Unitarian church and I think they both embraced secular humanism their entire adult lives. We were given a "liberal" religious education, from which I have never quite recovered...I don't know exactly what my brother or sister's status is currently. I was lucky enough to have a few good friends, dogs... and overall, a relatively happy if not unusual childhood. Anyway when you're in the "midst of it"... just about anything can seem "normal."

Talks about squelching dissent... as soon as religious absolutes are thrown into the fray with the assertion that they are not open to debate, there is little chance of discussion, compromise or reconciliation. Whether it's "for the Bible tells me so", the "Koran dictates", the "Torah says" or whatever, the discussion is usually over at that point.

I doubt that lions know about God, or believe in the supernatural... but I wonder what they're thinking about when they look at the moon. Do dogs think that man is God and do lions see us only as gods with a small "g" since they are formidable enough to eat us. I think lions and the elephants know about God, maybe the dogs do too, though they have sold their souls to man. Man used to be a brute, at least that's the spin if you believe in evolution... like I do. That means that we were once mere brutes and to this day we are partly brutes, you be the judge. The Aztecs were pretty brutish, the Nazi's were too... somewhere in our hearts and minds lurks that same tragic potential. We are the lions of darkness, subscribing to the same brutal status quo that for a while at least, guarantees, security and maybe even prosperity. Whether the life is that of a worker bee, an ancient Aztec or a modern day American, we are taught to cut the end off of the ham, even if it already fits into the pan. Are we doing it for a good reason, or just because we saw

someone else do it that way. Now we do it by habit, just as we are taught who to love, who to hate and who to kill by kings, president, fathers and mothers.

We are like sheep in the darkness and we need a good shepherd, but not ones that teach us to hate. We need the one that tell us to love, be vigilant and be prepared, otherwise we will revert to the insanity and chaos that has grasped this world for a million years. We can break the cycle of hate and violence that told the Maya's they need to make blood sacrifices and the cycle that told the different religions that they must destroy everyone else's religion, then we can live in peace.

If you question the life insurance salesman and take him to task over things that don't make sense, why shouldn't you be just as critical of the afterlife salesman - that is the preacher or mullah? He'll tell you that you can't hold him to the same standard as you'd hold the man who handles your life insurance because *he* works for God, not for a corporation. Objection! I believe he just *thinks* he works for God, he might be right... or he might be wrong.

It's too bad they won't try making a world where every land is a safe haven for Jews, Christians, Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, agnostics, atheists and every human being under the sun. Unfortunately no place can be a safe haven for anyone, when most of these groups demand dominion in their land over everyone else who is not of their particular ilk or faith.

"Is the Bible the inerrant word of God", the inquisitor asked the man he was torturing. "If it is, then you don't understand a word it says", his victim might have answered.

"How can I love you, wasn't it your teachers that said you have to love yourself to be able to love others? Meanwhile I have been taught that my people, the Arabs, are loathsome, so why would you love me? You talk of unconditional love, but that love seems obstructed by hate and fear. How can you help others to be saved, if you believe in thousands of years of mischief?

If you want to study the Bible, don't *just* do it with your priests and pastors, do it also with the libraries and books of wisdom, the ones they have not had the opportunity to burn yet.

Chapter - Three

The fundamentalists do themselves and the positive aspects of their cause more harm than good by their self righteousness. Unless they are right about the virtually complete destruction of the world (and they might be), then they will have very little credibility in ten or twenty years... if the world is still here. They will still have their hard core supporters, still preaching about the end of the world and how everyone is damned except them, but their cries will fall on deafer ears and their pews will be less full, possibly replaced by people at libraries and other meeting places, trying to discover the real truth. On the other hand, they seem to be working diligently to usher in Armageddon as that is their only salvation and justification for their mean spiritedness.

They might be right, that we're going to blow it and that only a small remnant will be saved, alternatively it could be a self fulfilling prophecy or just the same endless cycle of violence that the human race has always perpetuated on it's brothers and sisters. Maybe it will end some day, but we won't find out if this is the time for the circle to break. Funny how they are so up in arms about the De Vinci code... it seem they must discredit it, to maintain their hold on the sheeple.

The man from the church said that people need religion to answer the big questions of life, such as where we come from, who are we and where are we going. I think the number one reason, is that people want to be told there is a life after death. They don't care nearly as much as about where they came from, damn it we're here and that's good enough! We want someone to assure us that if we're "good" and do what we're told, we'll go to heaven, the heck with everyone else. Heaven's just around the next bend, that is - as long as we do what our leaders tell us to... after all, they know what God wants because they can hear him, but the rest of us apparently can't.

Is it a self-fulfilling prophecy when people are convinced that something will happen and they work to make it occur? Christians and Jews are perhaps the only ones that can make the prophecies of the Bible come true, after all they have brains, bonds and "bombs" in abundance. They also may have the power to stop the end of the world, which they have predicted, but how likely is that? There is a powerful cadre among them that will not be satisfied till their version of "history" comes to pass, and they will do whatever is necessary to help it along. That way,

they will go down in history as; being right, on the winning side and able to say “I told you so.”

I was listening to a radio host and his guest, discussing medieval combat in history and renaissance festival recreations. Two things came to mind, first the old saying that if we do not learn from history, we are bound to repeat it. Many people want to repeat what they consider glorious periods of history, thinking that there is magnificence in murdering others. Glory rhymes with gory and mayhem is too often seen as legitimate - as long as it is “officially” sanctioned. That and our short memories are a couple of the reasons why history is so often repeated.

Secondly, the host read an excerpt on the sacking of Constantinople and the killing of eastern orthodox Christians by the crusaders when they took the city. This just reinforced my belief that Christians are every bit as murderous as any one else that they accuse of being barbaric.

Hindus talk about the universe undergoing endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution. They also believe in karma... other ancients believed in the procession of equinox a 26,000 year cycle that supposedly had something to do with dark ages.

The Mayan’s talk about the 26,000 pleodes cycle being a center of gravity or center of the universe. In the year 1,000 some Christians thought that the world was coming to the world, sold their possessions and headed for the hills.

To project into the future, you have to project into the past the radio show guest stated. She went on to say that the ancients wanted to shield themselves against chaos. They wanted to maintain that they were in the center of the universe, sacred ground so to speak, the center of it all being inside each of us - she said.

Tribes generally referred to themselves in their tribal name as human beings, while those outside of their tribe are often referred to as subhuman, animals, demons even “butt faced.” The gist of it, is that we tend to divide the world between “us” and “them.”

The guest stated that the magnetic poles of the earth are shifting according to scientific studies done since 1955 and that all ancient prophecies are basically the same.

Sargon the great of Arcadia had wise men who wrote about the periodic destruction of the world by fire and water. According to the expert's research, the day that the world was to be destroyed was the day of the outbreak of the Gulf war. This was in the backyard of Sargon, she said, so in any case, the prophecy was fulfilled for the people of that region. Well, that may be a bit of a stretch, unless were talking about the proverbial slow motion train wreck.

Chaos, she said is the darkness beyond the campfire. The woman being interviewed was Mora Tims and her book was Beyond Prophecies And Predictions. The Mayans she says believed in, and their calendars supposedly prophesized that "gods" from the east would come to their land and that these "gods" would be white... this god was called Quetzacuatl.

Tims states that predictions are to warn people, so they can prepare, make adjustments and change outcomes - prophecies that comes to pass, she says are the ones that have failed to achieve their purpose. The host said, that means prophecy is therefore an evolutionary pile driver and in chaotic times archetypes arise like flowers. Archetypes she explains are symbols that go beyond the ordinary. Like a leap or giant step, they are systems designed to save us from complete destruction... like flowers blooming in spring, or new skin forming under a scab. She says there are many good things that we don't hear about in the news, these are things that are happening along with the bad things that we hear about all the time.

Tims describes human society as a cancer, in that it is growth without meaning. Prophecies are meant to put meaning back into the process of human existence and prophets put us back in touch with what we should really be doing. Since we don't heed the warnings, we periodically face global catastrophes and by putting our focus on the "Christ" idea, we can surmount the problems. The global brain can save us, she says... the whole thing makes me think that this woman would have made a good Oracle of Delphi!

On another day, I detect that a certain talk show host has a definite agenda, he wants security, since he is of a certain religious or ethnic group. To get security, you need power, to get power, he has started a group, his followers provide him with security, he supplies them with leadership. To have security, his group needs power, they get power by having weapons, money, land, influence etc. To have weapons, money, land, influence etc. you need to produce it, buy it, steal it or in some way obtain it. The easiest way is to take it by force, there are usually people around with what you covet, but without the strength to protect it.

The aggressive groups grows more powerful by including as many people as possible in their ranks. After it has achieved its goal of taking everything it wants and getting rid of those outside the group who might resist, the leaders feel secure. Then they realize that within the group are people who could be a threat to them. The leadership feels threatened by those who aren't ethnically etc. enough like them, or, by those who are as aggressive as they are, since those people might also covet power... so they get rid of them. The show's host harps about this being a Judeo Christian country, so conceivably if you do not believe in his religion, you may not be deemed worthy of being an America.

If you say you believe that Judeo Christianity had its roots in Sumerian, Babylonian or other near eastern religions, you could be called a heretic. So do you start your own militia like the show's host has, to protect yourself, or do you realize that power doesn't always come from the barrel of a gun – as he seems to believe. Do you follow the advice of Jesus and turn the other cheek and give away your cloak? Do you stand there and wait peacefully for the executioners sword to fall on your neck. *Unlike* this talk show host, do you really believe that to die in Christ is to gain?

How can we teach love through hate, peace through war, equality through prejudice, preservation through degradation and all the rest of this doublespeak. How can it be that we've all accepted it for so long?

Here's a scenario - they win after they kill or convert everyone but themselves. They can justify it, because finally there will be "world peace." The environment will no longer be threatened, because so many surplus heathens have been eliminated... reducing human pressure on the earth's resources. Let them rule the west, east, north and south... let them destroy everything if they want to. Let time reveal "the truth."

It seems quite bizarre, that God would make the world so orderly and at the same time so incomprehensible. Why would he reveal his truth to the Hebrew desert dwellers yet make it so difficult for the tribes that were subjugated to believe this truth? They tell me not to question, not to reason... I guess that's what I'd have to do to accept their version of things.

It may be a little tougher for a Hindu or Moslem to believe that Jesus was the only true son of God and born of a virgin, especially when their nations have often been invaded or under attack by Christians and occasionally by Jews. Interestingly, other cultures had virgin birth legends that preceded the Bible story. Did God

condemn to hell, a thousand generations of people who never heard the name Jesus? I agree that God works in mysterious ways, but that one takes the cake. Of course various theologians twist this one around like a pretzel, and as long as they're promising the descendants of these poor "damned" souls eternal life, many will gladly accept the offer and forget about poor grandpa.

Oh well, I thought, if that's what God says, then it must be so. After all the two thousand or so years of people not having a chance to hear his name might just be a drop in the bucket of time. Maybe in the future so many people from these nations would know Christ, that the hundreds of millions that may have been condemned to eternal damnation would be an "insignificant" number.

Still it seemed that there might be other interpretations of the Bible that were possible, especially in view of the teachings of such people as Herbert W. Armstrong who held that the King James version might have been poorly translated when it came to such important words as hell. "Perhaps", a friend of mine suggested, I should just be grateful to have been born in a Christian nation and do my best to enlighten the unbelievers.

It seems to me that you'd be hard pressed to sell a religion like orthodox Christianity to people who revere their ancestors, such as the Japanese and others. They are going to find this message rather strange, that their ancestors are all burning in hell eternally, because they did not believe in a savior that they never heard of.... Of course the preachers may have a clever rebuttal, as well as carrots and sticks to help persuade the "heathens."

Some theologians discourage people from thinking, debating, discussing ideas or writing. They say that if your ideas are not orthodox enough, then you are probably a false prophet or antichrist. The result is that people are often afraid to ask questions, or exercise their minds much at all. Shouldn't major religions be able to hold up to a bit of scrutiny? Granted we may not understand everything in God's word, or even be capable of such understanding, but why do they have to criticize or even persecute people for not accepting all of their "pat" answers as the Gospel truth?

At lunch today, a guy sitting next to us at the counter "joined" in on our conversation when he heard mention of our daughter's mission trip to Mexico. He was full of sage advice and Bible quotes... predictably I was a little annoyed. The message of Christianity is beautiful and for the most part, I like it best of all, but like Gandhi said when asked what he thought about Christians, "he'd like to meet

one.” The implication being that the professors of that faith that he’d met, talked the talk, but didn’t walk the walk. That’s one of the problems I have with it, despite the lovely language and peaceful message, Christians are as violent a group as any other religion and the more righteous they are, the more aggressive they seem to be... or at least the more willing to look the other way when the bomber jets are deployed.

I list the church and corporations as being founding members and integrals part of the military industrial complex. Going back to Plymouth Rock and Jamestown, the founding fathers brought the latest weapons to protect themselves or subdue the natives. The settlers of the Massachusetts colony at Plymouth Rock were supposedly religious “pilgrims”, while those in Jamestown, Virginia were supposedly more interested in economic gains. In both cases, they were armed to the teeth and needed to develop militias and an “arms industry”, which has evolved into today’s multi trillion dollar military industrial complex.

Just saw a TV documentary alleging that the pilgrims raided vital corn reserves from the Indians and desecrated their grave sites. We certainly got started off on the wrong foot!

I’m getting tired of being reprimanded for saying things like, “Oh God!” Instead I find myself saying “oh my Goodness!” That is unnatural and I’m going to rebel against you who want to tell me when to say God and who want to tell me what is the appropriate use of the word and what it means to use God’s name “in vain.” Control your own tongues and leave the rest of us alone!

Was just looking at our bank statement and see that “we” are giving the local church a couple hundred dollars a month. To my wife, this is minimal, I imagine that she would like to tithe the full 10% - to me this is giving our hard earned money to the local mafia. It’s another reason I’m for separate accounts... I’m reminded of it every time, I have to attend the church and sit through one of their war rallies.

Society’s “weak”, especially women and children, deserve and should be afforded protection from violence and abuse, but they should not be granted control over anyone else’s production and property. They should have the opportunity to excel and achieve, but not the right to appropriate wealth from other working people. The rich should pay a higher tax rate and not have tax breaks that are designed for them only. Maybe I’m wrong about all this and maybe the “meek shall inherit the

earth” means that women will control the world. If that is right and God’s plan, you haven’t convinced me of it yet.

"When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the bible we had the land....we closed our eyes. When we opened our eyes...we had the bible, they had the land!!!" ... Desmond Tutu

My definition of Heaven is a place where you don't worry about natural disasters of any kind, because God has taught us how to live safely with nature, and accidental injuries can be miraculously cured anyway. There won't be cords, cables, hoses or anything else that gets tangled. You don't need keys, fences or locks, since no one steals anything and you don't have to worry about trying to keep things in or out. They say that Heaven is not on earth, but humanity could go a long way to make things better for everything on this planet. Earth sometimes seems more like hell than heaven, but things tend to even out in the long run and we have lots of joy too. In Heaven, you don't need to make excuses or tell lies and there are no police... just former police. There's no disease or other misery of that type either... sounds like a cool place, but I'm not sure about playing harps etc.

If Thomas doubted even when Jesus was right there in front of him, what's so strange about someone being uncertain about faith during times like this? Especially in light of; the churches' excesses, Psalms that sounds like they were plagiarized from older Egyptian and Sumerian writing, the monotheistic teaching of Akhanaten, garden of Eden and Noah's Arc type stories from other cultures and the questionable translations of Gehenna, Sheol etc. Maybe as I heard a boy innocently state, we might become extinct instead of passing on to a more heavenly existence. I'm not a big believer in the doctrine of eternal punishment in hell, but accept that if God wants to do that, he definitely can.

Women seem to live primarily for love of family and children, whereas men seem to live for a few other things as well. I think we aren't as much *prisoners* (yes prisoners) of our emotions. One thing I *think* the Bible says, and that I agree with, is that the man should be the leader. We all like to talk, and I've casually observed that women tend to talk even more than men... a trait that I think can impede the process of getting things done.

When it gets right down to it, you have to eventually stop talking and get to work, which women do, but they end up with less time to goof off. That's fine if they like that set up, but I find it increasingly imposed on the rest of us and that's not so fine. In my experience, it seems that many women and lots of men as well, talk too

much and do too little. Because of this most of us never accomplish what we want to in life. One way that many of us waste literally years of our precious lives, is staring at the one eyed monster called TV, which mostly broadcasts nonsense or worse and is a major hindrance to accomplishing anything in our lives.

"I believe in God, not in a committee of gods, or of men or women. I don't believe everything in the Bible, but I would not change one letter or word... heck it's been changed enough. I'm not sure if it commands its adherents to evangelize, or to proselytize... but I think there's a difference and the former is better in many ways. I think the New Testament focuses on mercy and justice, not "killing them all and leaving it up to God to sort them out", see the four paraphrased scriptures below, attributed to Jesus, for further clarification.

- 1. Don't worry about the speck of sawdust in your neighbors eye while ignoring the wooden plank in your own eye.**
- 2. Let the one among you who is without blame throw the first stone at the person who sinned... (no one threw a stone at the victim.)**
- 3. Anyone who has lusted in his heart has committed adultery, (how manly of us can pass this test?)**
- 4. The greatest commandments are love the lord God with all your heart and all your mind and second, love your brother as yourself. All the other scriptures hang by these two commandments.**

You can harp about preaching about love, but the record shows that *somehow*, hate is often the message you're getting across. You divide the world into us and them, your "team" is saved and the rest of the world is unsaved... which translates as just plain damned. Throughout history, your trigger fingers have been among the busiest and your Pharisees have been the ruling class since the time of Jesus, they never gave up power and never plan to. You have twisted the truth so much that it makes a double-helix DNA molecule look as straight as an arrow.

Who's got soul, who's got "a" soul, and are these two the same thing.

Racists sometimes say that other ethnicities are like animals, brutes without a soul - claiming that only *their* sub-population have souls.

Stereotypically certain races, are reputed to have soul when it comes to music - supposedly being born gifted in that area... I'm talking about blacks, just in case you were waiting for me to be "specific." Whites, it seems don't quite measure up to blacks in the area of soul music. The supremacists might counter that it's rhythm or something other than a soul that generates the music.

Do humans even have souls, or is that just "religious" talk... there are "experts" on both side of the divide, some claim to know definitively one way or the other... I just hope we do. Some scientists say we are nothing but animals and the experience of seeing or passing through a tunnel of light during near death experiences, or seeing a savior, friend or relative beckoning us, is a just the optic nerve firing wildly as the brain is shutting down. The possibilities are endless...

Does my dog have soul? Will your cat have any kind of near death experience when it expires? Does Rover feel like he's walking through a tunnel of light towards some welcoming pooch or master at the end of the tunnel?

Who or what is God? Is "he" the omnipotent "being" that the Bible says created us in his own image. Is God an intelligence and purpose that permeates the universe, is God an "intelligent" chemical reaction, karma, or a mathematics equation, or something else? Why do the birds and the herds migrate, does God provide the mechanism or programming? Why do ants change their anthill construction methods before it rains, what tells them to do it, is it smell or chemistry, is God involved? Are humans merely natures usurpers, beings that want to be like God? Are we really doing nothing more than tampering and messing things up with our kingdoms, ideologies, religions and dogmas?

I can not support any group that says that anyone that does not agree with it and submit to its ideas is either irrelevant or, relevant only in a negative sense. That is what most of the religions that I'm aware of seem to do. The church tells my wife that she should submit to me if I am a proper Christian, it also teaches that if I am not, then she is to correct and perhaps oppose me. It may be sowing the seeds of destruction of the traditional family, as free thinking people may not accept as gospel truth, decisions made at Nicosia, Nicea and other supposed divinely inspired councils who claimed to be God's representatives on earth.

Chapter - Four

The keepers of superstition should not lead the seekers of truth, so how can there be an accord between them? Let the decrepit institutions of church and marriage sink into the abyss, if they seek to tyrannize and enslave lovers of freedom. The church, in my opinion has always been guilty and marriage increasingly wants a share of the mantle of oppression. Monogamous marriage, which when under ideal conditions of equality may be good, is not wholly a “natural” state of affairs. Marriage is a bit better for women than in the past, but thanks to the “democratic process” and a majority female electorate, men are increasingly receiving “payback.”

The Church (not God) and marriage (not love) are institutions that historically rise, ebb, flow and may even be subject to eventual failure and replacement by new “institutions”, if they don’t adapt to changes around them. Perhaps people can live with or without them, even adjust and thrive, but can we flourish without the freedom to pursue our God given right to the pursuit of happiness? Our creator - whoever or whatever that is, has instilled in our very being, a desire to seek; truth, prosperity, happiness and freedom.

These institutions as framed by humans and attributed to God, can assist us in the above pursuits, or they can, and often are an obstacle. If they seek to over-ride natural law and common sense, then God willing, these institutions will crumble to the ground... or hopefully find a point of balance and good sense. When the law empowers either spouse to lord over the other, then marriage becomes an obstacle to love and family unity – no longer worth the paper that license is written on. If one or the other partner is shackled, they will object and eventually turn on their oppressor, be it spouse, government or the church.

If women, for whom I think marriage was created more so than for men, abuse their current privileged status, then men may come to their senses and realize that marriage is no longer legitimate and dissolve the farce. In natural law, the strong lead the weak and it is obvious that man is usually, at least physically stronger. When by the decree of human institutions, the judges gavel is controlled by the hand of the weaker party and she is told to lead, even if by something as noble as the democratic vote, *then* the man should consider getting out of the way and letting her lead herself. I will get out of the way if I feel forced to, but I will not follow the keepers of the superstitions and haters of the truth.

I doubt if the dominant churches have ever considered other religions worthy of as much respect as theirs and now is no different. I would ask Hal Lindsey and the other scholars of prophecy, does the Bible's prophecy have to come to pass or could God's warnings be heeded and the apocalypse be avoided. I think I know what they'd say and it doesn't offer much hope, especially since the main protagonists in the Middle East are so polarized. Will the Palestinians eventually lay down their arms and agree to coexist with Israel? Will Israel stop *taking* Palestinian land? Will one or both sides be obliterated by nuclear, biological or other WMDs? It seems to me that the Israelis will never relinquish their claims, and it seems almost as unlikely that the Palestinians, Arabs and Moslems will ever relinquish theirs. With nuclear weapons in the hands of Israel, the Arabs probably will never displace them, and if they try again in earnest, the region and maybe the world could be damaged beyond repair.

Getting back to my diatribe, the church, has convinced my family and friends that I am irrelevant, irreverent, damned and a heretic, unless I will submit to what *they* say is God's will... as per their reading of the Bible. Religious leaders of any faith are IMO more superstitious than me, they do not allow for the possibility that their sources could possibly be wrong and have little or no interest in a systematic review of the evidence. Pastors, mullahs, priests, rabbis etc., despite their slick sermons, (possibly down loaded from the net and polished) are accomplices in the destruction of the family unit as it has been known. I see them as major disseminators of; superstitions, myths and legends... even if these orators occasionally have any doubts, they can not reveal them, or their "positions" will be jeopardized. Religious leaders' success, like that of a politician, hinges on bending with the wind and changing with the times... albeit slowly and without admitting it... he or she is rewarded not for divulging the truth, but for concealing it.

The church teaches that God and Jesus transcend; time, space, life and death. We can never do this on our own. Even if by cloning, downloading and transplanting people lived a million years, we would still be humans and we might as well accept it. Unlike God, eventually we will die and go through the worm, up in smoke or have what's left of us packed away a freezer. Even if some day we can travel through time, we will never do it anything like God.

Sunday mornings I sometimes feel positive about religion, but today, I'm questioning the church's authority to tell me how I should live. I don't question God's authority, though and I fear him because I believe "he" is just, which to a sinner like me can seem cruel. I think Jesus might be coming back in some shape

or form and I pray that he will be as merciful as he was last time. As for who he is, I don't know, but I accept that he is in one sense or another, the Son of God. I pray Jesus will be my savior, even though I admit to having questions and doubt about his nature, the resurrection, miracles and prophecies. I would like to ask him a lot of questions about hell and heaven and the "unsaved" for instance, but I don't question his authority... the "church" however is another story.

I wonder if you're right about all this stuff you say God has told you. Are you really sure that you know all the answers, or are you just hoping you're right, so you can win heavenly "crowns" and be able to keep saying "I told you so." I can't help "thinking what I think", since these questions have been in people's minds for thousands of years. You haven't convinced me otherwise yet, and until you practice more of the mercy you preach, you never will.

What gives you the right to say that, this and that is God "moving" or God's will. It seems to me that when things are going your way, it's "God" and when things are going against you, it's the devil... a pretty simple formula isn't it! Seems like you pretty much call it the way you want it ... your pious pronouncements notwithstanding.

The world has survived Y2K, millennium fever and fundamentalism has increased in power and influence, instead of diminishing. It was a premature assumption to expect it to loose power, after all, most reactionaries never said that the year 2000 would be climactic. Meanwhile, the underlying problems have not been solved, the lion has not laid down with the lamb and the troubles still persist. The church in general is extraordinarily patient and sees no reason to push and shove until matters are brought to a head in order to force the fulfillment of the Bible's prophecies.

I'm not real keen on trading the good old boys, for the good old girls or the good old anyone's telling me what to do. I don't care who they think they are, no one's going to tell me they're superior to the rest of us. The only way TPTB is going to gain my cooperation, is through coercion, which they're already doing. When Jesus comes in a cloud from the sky and if I'm lucky enough to see it, I'll bow to him and pray for mercy. I won't bow and pray for mercy to anyone else, not willingly anyway.

For a while, I was recruited to participate in reading morning devotions and was reading a passage by the author of the devotional. Paraphrased, it said that before the fall of Adam and Eve, there were no thorns or thistles on any branches and

that lions and tigers did not harm other animals to get meat. That's fine if you ignore the fossil record I muttered and read on. The rest of the family, listened to the devotion and I don't know what they thought about it. I wasn't going to say anymore about the bit on thistles and tigers, but as it would happen, the author had included two questions about that in the study section. It seems that the author was determined to teach that evolution is bunk and that God suddenly made thorns grow and tigers bite. "I'm not saying that God couldn't do that", I announced to the family, "but I don't believe that he did it that way."

My wife had a look of serious dismay on her face, as if she considered my words borderline blasphemy. Heck a few hundred years ago you could be burned at the stake for talking like that. In this neck of the woods, things haven't changed much, you can still get in a little trouble for talking that way. I saw her expression and reacted, "that's how I feel and I've got no problem with saying it."

It was kind of like the discussion on who to vote for with some acquaintances the other day, including one of my best friends. If you weren't going to vote for their candidate, you were considered crazy and it seemed they were trying to put quite a guilt trip on me. Around here, God is definitely reputed to support the Republican party.

My wife was kind, she didn't say anything else about it, unlike the rest of the gang, who seemed determined to impose their; opinion, "will" and candidate on me.

If you ignore the fossils our son said mischievously, then it's okay. I didn't know what the boy thought about all this talk. He was probably the only one out of the three siblings, to know what mom and dad were talking about.

The evangelicals who claim that Christians like them, were responsible for the founding of the U.S.A., are a thorn in my side. Why was it then, that three of the first six presidents of the U.S.A. were arguably Unitarians. Presently, Unitarians are frequently under attack as the ultimate secular humanist trouble makers, just as Unitarians often considered evangelicals to be the ultimate self righteous trouble makers. In the background I could hear a song about making love not war. Under the circumstances, it sounded a bit absurd to me, since we didn't seem to think that "you will reap what you sow" applied to us. Either that, or our people were determined to make the whole world live in peace, or rest in peace. As usual, the only way we knew of, to make this come about is by the sword.

If the opposing sides didn't learn to live in peace with each other, then all hell would someday break loose, as it had regularly throughout history. How could either side be right all the time? Neither side seems able to point to any *verifiable* evidence proving their side is "right" and that they should be able to be their brothers master. Mean while, in the background, I can hear Ozzie singing that it's, "no use being sorry, it's something I enjoy...Moma's feeling sorry, I've been a bad, bad boy."

Let Jesus handle it when he comes back, you never know, he many not consider us half as *just* as we think we are. We are more like the emperor in the old story, we only think we're clothed in splendor.

We all "come down" harshly on others, we all judge others, yet we are all sinners. Some of us specialize in lies, some in anger, others in stealing, pride, prejudice, greed etc., but we almost universally forgive *our* shortcomings and make a big deal of our neighbors.

How many of us would be judge, jury and executioner of those we dislike, fear or find foreign? How many would say - kill them all and let God sort them out, who would say throw them in jail without due process? How many of us would make blanket statements like "they" are all going to hell? When we do, we are like the ignorant, frightened heathen that chanted along to the priests incantations in the days of old. Our mosques, churches and temples are like the shrines of ancient pagan days. All a man can do is pray for God's help, stick to his guns and if truly brave - not bend his knee to any earthly leaders. Those who would say, "burn the witch", will find that the true "devil" is the one in a black and broken heart.

He'd have to get hooked on Jesus or something in order to throw it all away, but so far he had wanted the best of both worlds. He hadn't softened his heart and opened his mind like a lot of less egotistical people had, who had accepted Jesus. He believed that he had tried, but he wondered if he had tried hard enough. He still let doubts and intellectual arguments cloud the "truth" from his mind. It was interesting that in these days of the highest high technology ever, more people then ever were turning to God. It seemed that in these days of wars, pestilence and disease, the Bible rang truer in ever. Its prophecies were proof to many of its authenticity and its revelation of the future, instructed the reader beyond any doubt, what side he'd better be on. He had managed to almost overlook all these important pieces of evidence, leaving himself confused and hooked on his several vices.

He was waiting for some miracle in his life that would put everything in perspective, but the rest of the good people out there were selfless enough to take it on faith. This was despite the fact that most of them had not had the premonitions, the background or experiences that he had. He wasn't sure if they were valid, or to be chalked up to coincidence or statistical probability. God could do nothing with him till he was humbled and stopped relying on own selfish heart and average brain.

He had at one time wanted to be a good Christian, but he wasn't sure he was. Later, although not rejecting his Baptism, he decided he label was not very important and he wasn't even sure he wanted to be associated with "the church." So other than saying he was Baptized and had asked Jesus to be his personal savior, he was simply a man who believed in God most of the time and was an independent seeker, if such a thing was possible. He wanted to be saved and wanted to some day pass through the door and see his loved ones there. He didn't know if God was offering that to him through religion, but believed that Jesus could be the way and the truth. It was also apparent that his interest in being a Christian was largely because of fear and selfishness. It was mostly because the idea of hell scared him and in this day and age when Biblical prophecies "seemed" to be being fulfilled, it seemed like Christianity was a good basket to throw his eggs into.

On one level he was such egotistical, that he wanted to have a role in the drama of the world, instead of just being a simple guy who tried to do the right thing. On another level, having a role scared the heck out of him and made him just want material riches without the danger of a larger role. A lot of things were scaring the hell out of him this particular day. He just kept going back to the "advice" that the Bible was completely true and that he'd be better off believing it. That presented the dilemma of knowing that he would then have the responsibility to tell as many people as humanly possible about the Gospel of Jesus. Upon further reflection, he concluded that such a path would be "safer" than voicing questions to the orthodoxy of the church.

What was he to do, keep his mouth shut and excuse himself, because he wanted to be safe. This was a logical course because it appeared to offer some safety, and since he wasn't even sure he was a Christian, why should he endanger himself? On the other hand, he felt compelled to act and was rationalizing any danger, by telling himself that safety couldn't be guaranteed anyway so why not speak out.

He hoped that others would “honor” his right to speak his mind... but realized that was unlikely. He believed people should talk these questions of disagreement “to death” instead of fighting over these issues. At least they should respect each other's right to exist, talk and even to saber rattle. He had however decided, that he would not automatically “defend to the death” the other guys right to say whatever he wanted. Despite Benjamin Franklin’s flowery quote on the subject, he thought it was okay to pick and choose his fights more precisely.

In the greater scheme of things, does it matter what we want and what we say, or is that just our stupid opinion. It seems that God has told us what is right, his holy books states it the long way and in a nutshell. We can squawk all we want, but what the heck do any of us really know? Most people have a list in their head, such as; illicit sex, drugs and rock and roll are bad and God, mom and apple pie are good. We are told to repent of our sins and break these bad habits, with the knowledge that even at the 11th hour, God will forgive us, through you know who.

Temptations are usually very difficult to overcome once they taken root, so we are better off avoiding them like the plague in the first place. Sin is difficult to overcome, but I’m told we can overcome if we; hear no evil, see no evil and speak no evil. If it is close at hand it is hard to overcome, if it is out of sight and out of mind, then we can resist it better, so turn the channel when temptation is broadcast in our direction... vote with your remote. We can not do it all alone though and the help we need is available from religion, prayer and other believers that we know and likewise should support in their battle against sin.

Science, nature and our own observations raise endless questions about our universe. Scripture tell's us what God wishes to reveal about himself, things that we cannot figure out through our own studies of the universe, because they are beyond the scope of science. Science is impersonal, God is personal and is the explainer of the mysteries of the world. Since we cannot comprehend an infinite universe with infinite galaxies, God tells us we must have faith in him, and not in man's understanding of the vast unknown.

The self-righteous ones on the left should stop telling everyone what to do, because man made institutions have a lousy track record. The self-righteous ones on the right should also stop telling everyone what to do, because we're not sure that God is the one telling you what's right all the time, maybe you're unwittingly being led, by that fellow you call the devil. I don't suppose you'd ever admit that possibility!

I still have questions about creation, resurrection, hell, immaculate conception and a host of other things. The Bible doesn't cover these things in enough detail or else came out against some things to my chagrin and religious people offer no compelling answers. This could easily mean that I'm wrong and they're right, but that doesn't necessarily help me sort things out. Knowledge of the penalties of sin scares me, but not always enough to make me "correct" my behavior. I want to straighten out, but often lack what it takes, to follow the straight and narrow path. I want to have my cake and eat it too and the "experts", seem divided on the feasibility of that. For years, I feared getting caught smoking because the law could make my life a living hell if they caught me.

God's reaction scares me too, because there is no hiding and the good book says drugs are a bad, bad sin. The least he could was to warn others to read the Bible, ask God for forgiveness and try their best to stop sinning. Start with the mark of the beast in John's Revelation, because that might refer to the cashless, information highway, bar coded hand or head scanning days of the future. Then cross reference that section to the Gospel, where Jesus refers to the same thing and to other things that have come to pass, like the state of Israel, rise of the ten horned dragon and the anti-Christ. This has always been food for thought, it has stood test of time.

The problem with people living longer is scarcity of resources, if people didn't have to contend with shortages of necessities, then they wouldn't have to get rid of the old to make room for the new. That would rob nature of its need for a mechanism that makes the body age and reach its planned obsolescence and eventual failure. In the future people might have patches or implants that time release chemicals into our bodies that override or vaccinate us against the aging genes. If these technologies and cloning are perfected, people might start feeling pretty smug about death. Even if people can extend their lives to hundreds of years longer, they will not be immortal, nor has anyone come back from the other side, except they say for Jesus and supermen of other religions. Some claim they can channel or communicate with their departed clones via some sort of telepathy or shared psychic circuitry. Was this rebelling against God and would he be mad if we did this, this playing God.

"Well, I'll go too", he said with very little conviction. All of my usual questions would of course resurface. Was joining the local church a good idea? The pastor had mentioned in one sermon how being a member of the church made one responsible in certain ways to the church and its members and their goals. That's what bugged him, their goals, were not always his goals and he didn't want to feel

like he was under their thumb. They of course always claimed to be prayerfully doing what they believed was God's will, but he parted company with them on that account many a time.

He didn't want them breathing down his neck, telling him what his causes should be. He didn't want to be a good soldier in the local "lord's" army, or a company man in the local corporate church. He had told her he would join of his own free will, because that was how it was "supposed" to be. Upon reflection, he realized that he was doing it for the wrong reasons. He was mostly doing it so that the kids could be in with the "in" crowd at church and school and to make her happy. That obviously was not a great reason, in fact it was quite wrong.

He did believe that there was an infinitely powerful God out there and that world history and development was not completely the result of statistics, probability, or random chance that might someday be captured in a mathematical equation like $E=MC^2$. He believed in the intelligence and direction of God behind the laws of nature and therefore the probability or at least possibility of an evil intelligence behind the forces of chaos. He also wasn't sure about any of this and couldn't discount the arguments of agnostics or atheists. He wondered about the chart in the front of his wives study Bible, comparing passages from the Bible with Akkadian and other tablets and scrolls, but if he were ever to march to a drummer, it would be the one led by the cross. He still had never heard any wisdom that compared to Christ's and the reported miracles of Jesus gave him hope that there was soul existence after death and a promise that it was available to anyone who would believe and confess. He was sorely trying to do both and the heck with the baggage he carried with him from his secular liberal background.

What about evolution? Is it true? That's a good question, but a better question is what about God, what about heaven, what about hell, are these true? That's what the unsaved need to think about most, not did we come from monkeys. If we did, then we're both an embarrassment to each other.

There would have to be a great many coincidences in history and life for the Bible to be anything but true. Questions and doubts should not cause us to miss the bus. We should seek answers and research our questions, we will find out someday right...? The heart must still rule the head or else those from secular backgrounds will be dragged down by their baggage and they will never get around to ask Jesus for salvation. (Wait a minute, this note is being written several years after the above was written, I take this back to a large degree.)

Those of us who have thought "immoral" thoughts are as guilty as sin as those who commit those sins in real life. Does that mean that we should join them in jail or let them out? No.

If drug use is a sin then I will not be with God, unless I ask him for help and forgiveness, I ask that now. (Also written before I quit, ten year ago) Don't take the warnings of the Bible lightly, if they are grave, then God meant them to be that way, if he is really the author of the good book. Don't forget to ask God to save you, realize that you can't do it on your own and don't dwell on your doubts, dwell on the possibilities.

In heaven there is no need for locking your door, there are no Smokey the bear speed traps, there are no cable and cords to get tangled up in etc.

Chapter - Five

ROMANS 8:6 For to be carnally minded [is] death; but to be spiritually minded [is] life and peace.

I should not join this church, because I am not like minded enough to. If I was, I would join and become a member of the corporate church as you call it... (I'm still surprised the pastor actually used the word "corporate." Since I am not of similar enough religious and political persuasion, I would not bring anything positive to the union. I appreciate the opportunity to visit your church and benefit from and occasionally enjoy your messages. I have asked Jesus to be my savior and care about that personal relationship more than a corporate one, which to me smacks of belonging to a political action committee (PAC.) I applaud your congregation for every Godly thing you do, including your community efforts (I'm not so keen about some of your political efforts.)

I pray that you will find it in your heart do more, such as condemning the practice of cruel and unusual punishment in our prisons, even though it may never effect a single member of your church. It does effect many members of God's church and many of those victims have mothers and fathers who sit it some churches pews regularly. I confess to Jesus and to you that I am a sinner, I repent of my sins, regret them and pray that I can stop sinning. I will be surprised if Jesus can find my acceptable in his sight, but I am still praying for his grace, healing, forgiveness and salvation, because I know he doesn't want that any soul go astray and be lost.

Mr. Chuck Colson, yesterday a Pastor (and former Watergate convictee) said that, he would go into the depths of prison and walk down the corridors of 10 x 10 cells. He said he would shake hands with those who extended their hands from behind their bars and say "hi, I'm Chuck Colson, do you know Jesus?"

Mr. Colson, did you have to contend with the threat of rape and assault like many of those people do everyday? Were you in the general population or were you in a protected enclave, because of who you are, or who you knew. Can you find it in your heart to do something about their earthly plight? First Cor. 9:16? "Woe to me if I don't preach the Gospel." Yes, I agree that it is most important to save their souls, but you might have enough influence to help save them from further attack at the hands of those they are incarcerated with who have demons in their minds and weapons in their pants.

Getting back to the question of should he join a church, one day he believed he should. No profound reason why, just a bunch of little reasons and little steps of faith. He still didn't understand why things were the way they were, or how they should be, other people were better at that. He just knew that he and other humans were not supreme beings, by any stretch of the imagination. Instead, he believed in the supremacy of God and in trying to move in the direction of God. To a lesser degree, he believed in bell shaped curves, statistical models and random probability. Other than that, his faith was apparently quite weak and he was still skeptical, regrettably a "Doubting Thomas." He swayed somewhat with the wind and saw grey areas everywhere, he wanted to know more of God's secrets before he would believe and this he knew was impossible.

He still had questions about; evolution, the flood and the miracles of the Bible. He has seen enough Spielberg productions and magic shows, to take miracles with a grain. The capriciousness, chaos, brutality and seeming unfairness of life at times for so many people made him wonder. He wondered about hell and eternal damnation for those who never hear the word or are born with baggage that make the word hard to believe. The fact that Christians have been about as cruel to their fellow men and women as non-Christians, didn't help either. All of these little things were still in his baggage, but he didn't want them to weigh him down. He also didn't want to forget his own beliefs and people, unless they were wrong after all. He believed that they were not so bad as some people made them out to be, they weren't much different in many respects as anyone else's. As an aside, he wanted to remind his people that the worst is behind them if they will follow God's call to live in peace with their brothers.

The Biblical God holds a gun to your head, it's the threat of eternal damnation. But it's for your "own good", because he can reward you with true love and happiness if you do what he wants you to do, which of course is the right thing to do anyway. People on the other hand twist your arm and threaten you with harm, but they can only torture or kill you and your loved ones for a finite amount of time, it will end and then if you and they have been true, you and your loved one's will have eternal happiness... I hope! After you do the bidding of evil people, they generally do you in anyway, or allow you at best, a miserable life, or even if they give you rewards, they are temporary and empty, the exact opposite of God's rewards.

Jesus said spread his gospel around the world, he did not say to crusade with a sword of steel, but with the sword of truth, which some of us think of as a pen.

You are too damn willing to blow people's brains out to really be as interested in saving their souls as you say you are.

If there's a holy war here, or coming, I am not sure I want the GOP and its current quasi-official church running our lives. I'll take GOD as I try to comprehend God and follow my conscience, imperfect as that may be. No earthly church is right all the time, so when they tell you that it's okay, and even noble to go out and kill the enemy, think about what you're doing. Is that man in his own country 6,000 miles away, really your enemy. Even if he is, that doesn't mean a God fearing person should kill him unless, it's to the point where you have to take action to directly save lives... democratization and nation building are a slippery slope and often have at their base economics or geo-politics.

Give that pre-emptive action that they are suggesting you take a lot of thought, because we often strike for the wrong reasons. Like possibly in Vietnam, or we wait too long to strike, as in the cases of Nazi Germany and Bosnia. Just as the Church of England was the church of the Kings that Washington and Jefferson revolted against, I feel justified in revolting against a church that preaches the new testament but practices the old testament. When they start turning the other cheek and stop being the first to call for casting the first stone, then maybe I can join their church in good conscience. Despite the sin in my own life, I have the right to follow my conscience and not that of the warmongers. They would carelessly and with little regret, lead the flock into battle, crushing everything in their path, if they can, but proving nothing since you can conquer the world and still be wrong!

As far as the nine essentials, I believe God can do anything God wants. As far as believing all nine essentials, for starters, I'm not convinced that God promises eternal punishing to the unsaved. I believe God has the power and authority to do it and might eternally punish the unsaved, but not necessarily punish them day in and day out for eternity. I've heard arguments that God may destroy sinners bodies and souls, but possibly not use the process of constant eternal horrific torture to do it, he might do it more quickly. This is just an opinion and nothing original, the late Herbert W. Armstrong of the Worldwide Church of God wrote extensively about this and researched it carefully. Regardless however, what he may have discovered is meaningless unless other people pray about it, study the holy books and ask God for guidance.

For a brief period about ten years ago, I was fairly close to believing the churches views on evolution, resurrection and the virgin birth. Now however, my faith, in "conventional theology", is back to a very low point. I hope God will help me to

overcome my doubts and help me to come to believe 1,000% all of the time, if that is his will, otherwise, I pray he will direct me in a course that's true. I wonder if in addition to doing research on my own, I should also be like a little child when I think about it? I was told to pray that I will not cloud my mind with the baggage of upbringing, "education" and indoctrination absorbed over my lifetime. I pray that God will be caring enough to lead the way for those of us who find organized religion a morass of power hungry ideologues and demagogues.

I believe that although God could torment and punish us eternally, maybe he wouldn't, maybe he wouldn't even allow any evil force in the universe to do it either. Those of you who are scared into believing that he would, should study the Bible carefully and learn the difference between sheol, hades, tartaros and gehenna. Learn how they offer evidence that God may be more merciful than you've been told.

Welcome to post logical America! We have gone from the age of enlightenment, to the morass of demagoguery.

I used to want to believe the Bible, but my faith was usually so weak that in reality I don't think I could have ever been counted as a "believer." I wouldn't mind being one, but with my beliefs, wouldn't I be an insult to the word Christian? Maybe some day I will get my priorities "in order", at which point I might be worthy of calling myself a Christian. I don't care about the label Christian, but I do pray that Jesus or God will save me... whatever that means.

I surrender to God, I submit to God, I fear God and respect God. I pray that murderers, killers for hire, killers for ideology and rapists repent and find a new occupation... any new occupation.

Was Jesus just another guy who started a religion around himself (or was it Paul/Saul), or is he really the undisputed heavy-weight champion Son of God and God in human form as they say he is. Did he really result from an immaculate conception and virgin birth, did he really rise and go to Heaven. All I believe for sure is that his mother was a woman named Mary... I have no idea who his father was and don't take the Bible stories as the gospel truth. They may be true, but it's also possible that all we know with relative certainty is that she was impregnated prior to her marriage to Joseph and that quite possibly Joseph was not the father of Jesus.

I used to wrestle with these questions a great deal and depending on what side of the bed I got up on or what was happening in the world, I would sometimes lose faith almost entirely. Then (back in the late 80s and early 90s), after watching TV prophecy in the news shows, sitting through church or after encountering some of the strange coincidences in his life, I tried believe. Now it occurs to me that the “strange coincidences” might not be so strange after all, but instead may be fairly random and statistically predictable. At other times in life, my skepticism has been breached and even though I don’t understand the mechanisms that God uses, I believed the Bible is true and that things happened and will continue to just like the Bible says. After all, the mechanisms are almost in place now for things like virgin birth, and resurrection could be the next step after life support and CPR... They could literally be just around the next corner of history.

Surely history will continue down its dreadful, tumultuous path, unless there is supernatural assistance and I can’t imagine how that might come about.

In the early 90’s, an Iranian woman named Manaz Akaami was charged with corrupting on earth and warring with God. These charges were brought by the reactionaries and it made me wonder if this could happen in the U.S.A. Were our religious reactionaries capable of similar behavior? It was obvious that fanatics on both the left and the right were capable of horrendous crimes against humanity and God. Manaz Akaami was living in exile, her crime was being a part of the feminist movement... later I read The Handmaiden by Margaret Atkins and saw potential parallels. Looking at western history, we can see that we’ve had our own inquisitions and witch hunts and I wonder if they could happen again?

Temptations of the flesh are difficult for many people to overcome and our best bet is to avoid situations that might lead to them like the plague... and that includes avoiding people who are into such vices, because misery loves company. Sin is difficult to overcome, so there’s something to the old adage, “see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil.” If temptation is close at hand it is harder to resist, if it is out of sight and out of mind, we can resist it better, so vote with your remote and turn the channel or stay out of those joints. We can not do it all alone though and the help we need is available through prayer, spirituality and supportive people in our lives, likewise we should support them in their battle against temptation and sin.

Science, nature and our own observations raise endless questions about our universe. Scripture tells us what ancient man believed God wished to reveal about himself, things that we still cannot figure out through our own studies of the

universe, because they seem beyond the scope of science. Science is impersonal, while God is more personal and his so called emissaries, represent themselves as portals to the mysteries of the world. Since we cannot even comprehend our infinite universe with its infinite number of stars and galaxies, religion tells us we must have faith in their interpretation of God and not in our own understanding of the vast unknown.

I hope that this world passes away into a better one, in which the rights of the individual are no longer trampled on by the rights of that thing known as "society." When society becomes a thing that squelches the rights of the individual to serve its interest groups' self interest and not that of the individual, then it's time for it to collapse under its own rotten weight. When society and its government forgets it was created to serve everyone, when the powerful feel so threatened by the world, that they introduce only self-serving laws, then they have failed. When the laws of God and nature are inverted and the strong are ruled by the weak by the virtue of the weak having more voters, then there's also something wrong. Such is the case when men in their desire to protect the "weaker vessel", hand the reigns of power to the women. Such was also the case, I believe in the usurpation of Palestine via the UN.

It's time we get our heads out of our behinds, it's time to open our eyes and see what's going on. Stop saying maybe they're right or maybe we're right. It doesn't matter who's right when people are trying to steal your freedom, your property, your children and your country. Stop saying, I'm strong enough to make it out there even if they stack the deck against me. You might be, but your brother isn't and his enemies are crushing him, don't wait till it's too late for all of us. Stand together, because when we've finally given up too much, by way of "the law", then it might be too late to recover our rights, at the very least, it will be much bloodier for everyone involved.

Guarantee everyone the same rights related to, "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness", but don't let anyone deprive you of those same God given rights, no matter in what guise the thievery is wrapped. We all get weaker as we age and sooner or later we need somebody to lean on. If we allow ourselves to loose our rights to controlling the bounty of our labor, because the majority of voters wants it that way, then we might as well plan on ourselves and our sons, becoming permanent second class citizens. That is not good for our sons and I dare say, neither is it good for our daughters.

We used to live surrounded by adversities and threats to our existence. We did our best to survive and reduce the threats, but we realized that they were a part of life. Now we no longer accept them and think we can vote for, or invent a utopian society. Some people believe in this so strongly, that they are willing to destroy anything they see as standing in the way of their agenda. That's where religions, governments and gangs come in, they claim to have the right to decide who's in the way and how they should be dealt with. They tell us that their solutions are for our own good and that God has told them what to do. They often say that it's for the victims own good, or at least that he had it coming.

Whether or not we have the responsibility to intervene in other countries like, Sudan, Bosnia, Haiti, Kuwait, Iraq, Panama, Somalia or elsewhere seems to depend on several factors. These include the economy, morality, national security and other governmental stratagem. "Jobs, jobs, jobs" as president Bush the elder said must have played a part in our decision to liberate Kuwait.

Our government did not seem to think that the jobs argument applied to Bosnia, so they did not try to sell this war to the people, at least not until Srebrenica and other massacres brought the morality issue to light. Another major cause for our entry into the Gulf war was the fear that our oil supply would be cut off leading to an immediate economic crisis... but that's another story.

In Bosnia there was an even greater economic reason to save people from genocide. That economic reason, was that it might please God and he would reward or protect us for doing what is right. Of course I'm just guessing, since I don't know what God thinks. If the reported ethnic cleansing in Bosnia was true and if the Serbians thought they were doing God's will, I think they were quite mistaken and they would have done well to quit. This same logic seems to influence our middle east policy and our unconditional report of Israel.

The Serbs so called defense of Christianity in Europe was the wrong thing and a tragedy. The mistreatment of the Moslem Bosnians was no more a Holy Crusade than Terrorist bombs are a Jihad. The "100 Years War" in Europe lasted 116 years the factoid on the TV Tube read. That was between Protestants and Catholics I think, and it seems ridiculous now. Meanwhile in the late 80s and early 90s, the massacre of the Bosnians Moslems was tolerated for several years before NATO finally stepped in and stopped the killing. If the U.S. really wants to be a moral leader, they could accept "mercenary" duty to protect beleaguered peoples. After all we have dabbled in this area in many places such as Kuwait where much of the expense was born by foreign countries. Of course we would be moral

mercenaries only if we only acted to save people and not nations or jobs. The last thing we need is another 116 years of religious war, advertised as a Crusade, Jihad or anything else.

The problem I see with Christianity, (not Christ) is that it historically has tried to destroy any religion or philosophy that it saw as being in competition with it. This would be fine if they succeed in replacing the competition honestly through the truth, but they have instead done it via witch hunts and the sword. More than most other religions they have assumed that they are the exclusive and only way to salvation and anyone that does not go along with them is against God and expendable.

What is eternal life or eternal damnation? After reading and hearing about near death experiences and out of body experiences in G-Force chambers and elsewhere, I wonder if there are logical explanations for the floating sensations and the tunnel vision that many people describe. The scientists say that lack of blood flow to the brain caused by heart failure or G-Forces cause the tunnel vision and the floating sensation could be the bodies way of trying to survive a most difficult situation.

Next comes the part about eternal this, or eternal that; if one dies with a smile on ones face, that is to say if one experiences a happy death experience, like most near death subjects describe, maybe that will be person is eternally happy, since their last experience before loosing consciousness was pleasant. A small number of people report that their near death experience was unpleasant or frightening and some of them believe they have been given a glimpse of hell. This could mean there is a literal hell, or it could mean that they are dying without being at peace - or something else negative was going on. If their last moments of sub consciousness before blacking out were negative, then the person might feel that the afterlife would be torment for them. Some of these people have gone on to change their lives in positive ways... cool.

Of course there might really be an afterlife, despite the skeptics explanations, in which case there could be genuine eternal bliss or damnation. On the other hand, it is possible that stories of near death experiences have been around since time immemorial leading to ancient and modern explanations that there is a heaven and a hell. Post modern explanations might include the possibility of heaven or hell, or just the possibility of dying with a final positive or negative experience. I'm praying for a positive one, since if I'm lucky enough to have a smile in my face at that final moment, maybe I will rest in peace eternally. Who knows?

The question arises... how can one maximize his chances of having one of these positive death experiences? Cases of negative experiences reportedly occur more often to people who described themselves as “bad” or “mean” although I don’t know if researchers have statistically verified that trend. People with positive near death experiences seem to come from all different backgrounds and frequently say they saw Jesus or Mohammed or whoever the savior in their culture is - alternatively, they sometimes see departed loved ones. It would be interesting to see if these people were “nice, happy people.”

One might expect that by living a “good” life we are more likely to die with a smile on our face, and more likely to achieve that eternal smile. In any case, if we follow the golden rule we will at least do more good to our fellow humans in this life and it’s unlikely that such behavior would hurt us in the end, or in the “next world.”

Will our last dreamlike thoughts send our soul off to the heavens and do we become stars? Or will our last dream be a nightmare which could plunge our essence forever into gloom and doom? Does it even matter... can we ever know?

My mind switches tracks and returns to the internal debate about joining the local church. I will not join the local church because I am not even close to being like minded enough with their “semi-official” views. I am not in total or even substantial agreement with their theology and politics. They say I should just be concerned with theology, but it seems to me that religion and politics are thoroughly intertwined. As I am not enough in agreement with their theology or their politics to join, I hope they will still accept my wife and kids... for their sake, I keep a low profile.

I believe God can do whatever he wants with us, take us to heaven, send us to hell, leave us in limbo, or whatever... *God’s* got the power! But I wonder why the word Gehenna was translated as “hell” in the Bible, when Gehenna was a trash dump outside of Jerusalem. It’s also quite interesting that the words; tartaros, cheol and hades were also translated as same word... hell. In the English of King James day, hell meant a hole in the ground, as in where potatoes were stored in the winter - hundreds of years before refrigerators. Tartaros, I believe, meant the lake of fire and hades referred to the underworld... or the domain of the dead. All these words as defined have similarities, but arguably they have differences too. Furthermore, in some places in the Bible and in various versions, they have been left alone and not translated as hell.

Chapter - Six

I admitted to a buddy that maybe the only reason I ever believe in the Bible is that I've been told a million times, I burn in Hell if I didn't. "Not a very good reason", he said.

"Wait a minute", I rebutted weakly, "Jesus is so merciful that I have hope in him even though I have my fears. He may be forgiving enough to save a wretch like me."

What the brain "down loaders" offer is not as good as what Jesus offered. Continued mortal existence does not compare to the life that the Bible describes. But, to many people, what the down loaders offered was pretty good, in some of their minds even better than what they expected in the hereafter. Some didn't believe in the hereafter, some did and some didn't want to get there.

This morning I woke up and after some thought changed my mind about evolution. This day the logic of us evolving from ancient humanoid apes was just starting to escape him, but the logic of that humanoid ape evolving from creatures that crawled out of the sea seemed an even greater stretch. There was a reverse Scopes trial going on in my mind. I was finding that it wasn't necessary to embrace evolution or creation, I could remain open minded about both theories, seeing as neither was yet completely "proven."

Religions it seems to me, are largely superstitions and myths, but the prophecies may still be true because there probably *is* some supernatural mechanism in control of the universe and if so, wouldn't it have the ability to express itself. Not to mention that prophecies might be self-full-filling, especially when in the hands of determined people.

According to the man on the nature show on TV, success for an individual organism in evolutionary terms means reproducing. We always hear that the number one goal of the individual is surviving and this is probably true. But the number one goal of our DNA, is to swim in the gene pool so that our lineage stays in circulation and does not become extinct.

The individual's goal of surviving is consistent with nature's goal of reproduction, because the longer the individual survives, the more likely it is to reproduce.

"I don't think either one of us should be the other's master, but if there is to be a master between us, then I'll be your master, you won't be mine", he told her.

"Jesus is my master", she replied. "If you had any sense you would let him be yours too."

"The problem is that I don't believe *all* of your story of Jesus, I think the establishment church has missed the point, so why should I accept your version of things?"

"It's not our version, it's his, it's God's version that I live by!", she told him sternly.

"I'm sorry, I'm not convinced that you've got it right", he replied.

"I know I don't have the Christian walk down right", she said defensively. "But I know that it's right and I strive to be a better Christian all the time."

"Yeah, but I think your buddies have got a lot of superstition and misinterpretation, you might have missed Jesus' point and that's why I don't want to take orders from the church. I say mind your own business and stop thinking that everyone else's business is yours, take your million laws and stick em you know where..."

He would have gone on forever, but she slammed down the book she had been reading and stomped out of the room.

Organized religion is an elaborately designed ritual to get rid of our shame and guilt, so is just about everything else in society.

I had snuck into heaven through a worm hole that connected the universe of the living to the world of the everlasting. Now I was privy to all the good stuff going on up there, though only till St. Peter's boys caught up to me, and that would be soon, since they were hot on my trail... I had to get away from them somehow.

Here was a world with no locks, no keys, (except at St. Peter's house). I saw a line of people and jumped into the middle hoping to evade those dream police, I don't like cutting in line, but sometimes you have to. "What's going on?" I asked one of the people

in front of me. The man looked sad and dejected, "don't you know? We're waiting for the 'forget them' pill."

I considered his statement momentarily, but could make no sense of it, "what the hell.. I mean what on earth, I mean what in heavens name is a forget them pill?"

The man looked very surprised, "are you sure you belong in this line, everyone here knows what a forget them pill is!" He turned away and ignored me, walking forward a few more steps to where the line had advanced.

Next I asked the lady behind me, but she was angry about my line jumping and would not even talk to me... besides she was sobbing uncontrollably. "Jeez!" I thought, "what the heck's going on here anyway, the sign said Heaven, why's everyone so crabby."

Finally I neared the front of the line and heard what was going down. "Who are you trying to forget", the nurse asked the man in front of me. "My whole family", he said sadly, "none of them are here, I was told that they're in hell, it's driving me crazy, I've got to take the pill."

"Yes, yes, very well", the nurse said, "open your mouth". The man obliged and she popped an extra large 'forget them' pill in his mouth. He swallowed, closed his eyes and a great big smile crossed over his face. "How do you feel", the nurse asked. "Fine, great!", he admitted. "Who were you trying to forget?", she quizzed him. "Shoot, I don't know...", he said ... a blank look on his face. "Good", nurse Cratchet said with a smile..."next!"

For a second I considered reminding the man who he had just forgotten, but what the heck, there was no reason to spoil the guy's bliss. "Next!", the nurse said again. I took my pill and pretended to swallow, "who did you want to forget?", she asked. "I forget", I said with a devilish smile and walked away. "Good", the nurse said, "next!"

Is there a God? Usually I choose to think there is and admit that I do so for somewhat emotional and selfish reasons. First of all, my evidence is shaky at best and it's untried. For example, I think that the phone rings when I'm in the bathroom more than it should based on random chance, but I have never tested this theory and if I did, logic dictates the theory would prove incorrect. From a believer's point of view however, it is logical that God would use such a minor inconvenience to stress me. The Bible says that God will test you to the maximum that you can handle and no more, so there is some connection there.

Secondly and also selfishly, I want to have an afterlife or at least some final dream that will make me think that there's an afterlife. To increase my likely hood of that, I wish I had never asked the tough questions of life. It seems that those who keep their mouths shut, don't ask tough questions and believe what the preacher's tell them, may be more likely to have that ethereal experience at the end. After all, that's what they expect and aren't they likely to get what they expect? Those who are skeptical may be the least likely to have a positive experience when they "leave the building", so why not be naïve... that's what I'm wishing for.

It looked like a religious war was brewing inside the ring...

First Tyson came into the ring from his dressing room, followed by his entourage - music blaring throughout the MGM Grande arena, he chose rap. Next Holyfield made his way towards the ring from his dressing room, his entourage in tow, powerful gospel music was playing as he approached.

One fighter was a Christian, the other a Muslim and both men were black. This was to some a religious war as well as a fight. To many people, Holyfield, like his name implied was "holy." To them, Tyson the converted "Muslim" was the enemy - deranged and evil. He had a tattoo of Mao Tse Tung on one shoulder. "He's a Muslim - Commie", my friend stated, as the six of us settled onto the big couch and chairs to watch the spectacle. The two thirteen year old boys among us may have taken note of his comments and drawn their own conclusions. I had heard that Tyson had the tattoo put on because he admired Mao.

I wondered if Tyson knew much about Mao, certainly he didn't seem to know much about one of his other role models, Alexander the Great. During the TV interview, Tyson pointed to the statue of Alexander in the garden of his estate. "I've read everything I can get my eyes on about Alexander", Tyson said. "Did you know he was gay", the interviewer asked with a smile. "I don't know nothing about that", the great boxer replied, "I just know he could kick some ass!"

The fight had been the topic of the TV and radio talk shows for days leading up to it. Should boxing be banned? I don't think the NPR host or most of her audience would mind.

In the Bible a prophet is told that a valley of bones will come alive and the dry bones of the old Hebrews will be covered with sinew, muscle and flesh, allowing them to come alive. If there were two people that I would like to see resurrected in

this manner, at the moment it would be U.S Grant and the Pharaoh Akhenaton, I see them both as enigmas.

What is religion? Organized religion is politics without debate and it is pseudo science with no desire to discover truth.

“Religion is the opiate of the masses”.... Karl Marx

“There are not Christians, Moslems and Jews, there are only two kinds of people in the world. Those with religion and no brains and those with brains and no religion”... Crusades era Syrian poet.

What humankind needs is a search for the truth, using historical evidence, archeology and the scientific method to discover answers to *some* of the questions that tug at our hearts, brains and souls. If the answers are not immediately forthcoming, we need not make them up as the organized religions may have done, instead we should keep searching, debating and patiently waiting.

Thunder far away...

“I don't know if there's a God up there", he said, "and if God's *up there*, what God been doing? Heck, just look at this century, 50 million killed in the world wars, 7 million murdered in the holocaust, Bosnia, Rwanda, Iraq, 9/11, poison gas, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, it just keeps going on and going".

Just then our “peace” was shattered by a sudden flash of lightning and the roar of thunder somewhere in the night.

"Ha! Did you hear that", my friend quipped, "God heard you and God's not very happy". "Yeah", I thought, but it sounded far away, just like God.

Is God an idea created by humankind to help us deal with the realization of our inevitable death? Is our zeal for life so great that we need to have some hope of the hereafter to cling on to? We may think that life's a shit sandwich sometimes, but we sure don't want to leave the building.

Near death experiences might tell us something of the hereafter, or maybe they don't. In any case, we should examine them, because they certainly seem to change the lives of the people who have them.

Some people say that *if* there was no God, people would have no reason to be good- they say we would be even more violent and blood thirsty. Others say that on a “self centered human” basis, we might logically expect to receive good things in return for good deeds. I don’t think this is necessarily due to Karma or anything metaphysical, but simply because by planting seeds of goodwill, some of those around us will respond to us in kind.

On a related note, it appears that people constantly try to create obligations among their peers. We expect that others will “return the favors” that we do for them. Getting back to the previous paragraph, maybe we can learn the advantages of being civil to each other without the necessity of any particular dogma. If anything, I think organized religions encourage us to be civil primarily for self serving “recruiting” purposes... I guess that’s better than nothing! On the other hand, these same religions convince their members that it is somehow okay to abuse or liquidate the competition... usually this is done “in the name of God.” Life is sometimes capricious and justice is never certain, at least not in this life.

One person's savior is another person's deceiver and who we follow is largely based on the religious “education” we receive in our early years. I would be happy to have a "personal" relationship with Jesus, if that will save my soul, but I’m suspicious of the mullahs, pastors and others who claim to have all the answers. This has led to some rancor in our home, but not nearly as much as in other homes I have seen, where spouses are even less tolerant of different ideas... throwing away books they don’t like etc.

It seems to me, that organized religions are more involved in selling afterlife insurance and promoting party politics than in promoting a personal relationship with God. By insisting that the flock see things only according to their own "understanding" I feel that church deprived me of an honest examination of life’s pivotal questions. I want to hear both sides of the story, not just canned sermons designed to frighten the listeners into submitting to the churches theology.

I see signs of God in; nature, coincidences, history and other phenomena. Most of the time I believe in an all powerful God - positive, personal and incomprehensible but in control the universe. Sometimes however I have my doubts, especially when I see random or brutal taking of innocent life. I’m troubled a bit by those who claim that God saved them, even when their neighbors have been decimated... that’s when religion seems more like superstition, meanness and fear. For its part, religions seem to support anything that keeps the flock in line and under “control.”

One week they say that one thing and the next they explain away some inconsistency, in order to keep an influential member out of trouble.

I have seen more than a few contradictions in the Bible and reviewed books and web sites that examine the issue. The "promise" of eternal life for the faithful and eternal torment for the non-conformist, seems enough to keep most people in the fold and putting their "offering" in the plate... it seems like a premium for their "afterlife insurance." Meanwhile, the usually clean cut men in neat suits exercise substantial control over the people in their communities, both socially and politically. This is not the way for me!

I don't see God in their impressive church buildings, slick talking preachers or healing services at the arenas and convention centers. I went to one, where tens of thousands gathered and gave offerings of money for the services of a famous faith healer whose entourage carefully selected who could approach the stage. It seemed like they deliberately kept the worst cases far from the "miracle man." In my opinion, the man was a charlatan enriching himself at the expense of the desperate, sick and superstitious... but what do I know. It makes me just a bit ill, to see them telling only one side of the complicated story of the church and religion. I find the study of Biblical archeology, the historical Jesus and comparative religion far more interesting. For me at least, this puts religion in a more accurate context, showing from where it arose, and what historical parallels the major belief systems share.

Some time ago, our son came back from a week of church camp and announced that he wanted to go to a Christian school. My wife was all for it, although she told their son that it's "dad's" decision. I was not enthusiastic about the idea and our child reacted as he may have been expected to, after his week at the camp. At the time, I was planning to drive to the west coast, which elicited an emotional outburst from the child. Breaking into tears sonny child begged me not to go and cried out , "you're going to die!" That was followed by the question, "if you die tonight, do you know where you will go?" This is a question the church frequently asks to "separate the men from the boys." It targets our fear of; death and the unknown – leading up to the assurance that if we accept their "program", everything will be all right, but if we don't we are surely, and eternally damned. Not a bad carrot and stick... In Islam there are similar risk reward scenarios, one being the martyrs reward, is it 70 virgins and rivers of wine? Not a bad way to recruit fighters.

In my son's mind, there were only two possible answers to the question he had asked me. At church camp he had attended chapel sessions and the charismatic

camp leaders assured the children the only choice was, heaven or hell. My son seemed convinced that since I had stopped going to church, and followed my own flawed conscience, I must surely have “earned” a ticket to hell. If sonny boy had not spent the week at the church camp, my wife and I may not have engaged in the resulting angry scene regarding my planned trip to help my sister move out west.

The point is that religious education or expression is a serious matter that can divide a family if they are not all on the same wavelength. I think my beliefs are considered null, void and invalid by the church our family attends. My impressionable children have been somewhat turned against me in regards to religion, although now that sonny is older, he is at least seems a bit more open minded. My wife and my daughter, still seem to contend that I must be saved in precisely the way that their church dictates, or I will burn, and be tormented in hell eternally. This is a bit of a burden on all of us, but we try to work through it and as much as possible, to respect each others beliefs. The church also teaches the women that the husband should be the spiritual leader of the family, but *only* if he agrees with the teachings of the church... not a bad caveat! If the husband does not agree with their teaching, then he is wrong and loses the mantle of legitimacy that would otherwise be placed upon him... not a bad “enticement” to go with the flow! Of course, most people never stray very far from their religious roots anyway, so such measures are only needed for “hard cases”... like me.

To the bosom of Abraham... is that where we all get a chance to go when we die? I’m amazed that God, would allow the majority of humankind for the last who knows how many thousands of years, burn in hell. God is beyond our ability to understand and so are God’s ways... but if most of the humans that were ever born are in hell because they didn’t accept Jesus in the manner “prescribed” then the creator is even more incomprehensible. On the other hand, maybe it’s just a manmade contrivance, designed to keep the sheeple in line... as far as I’m concerned human theologies are just another nail in the coffin of organized religion.

My society might be more tolerant of my criticism of organized religions, as long as I’m more critical of “other” religions and a bit kinder to “theirs” ... I’d rather not play that game.

What do I believe? You might as well call in the inquisitors, as it’s really no one else’s business... and extremists will find that statement more than enough to judge me by. The guidelines you’re following from the various councils of men, (Nicea, etc.) mean very little to those of us who have inquiring minds. In fact councils of

men are less than meaningful, bogus and IMO primarily contrived to keep the sheeple in line.

Of course God could be sending billions of people to hell and approving of powerful armies “spreading the gospel” through out the world, but I’m inclined to believe these are the machinations of man and woman... not of the creator.

I pray that there is a God, I know I am a sinner and I repent of my sins. I ask God to forgive me, but I don’t call myself a Christian or anything else. When asked what he thought about Christians, the man of peace Gandhi once said something like... I’d like to meet one, meaning I suppose that he’d never met one who truly walked the walk. Are “true” Christians supposed to believe that Gandhi is burning in hell? I don’t think anyone can live up to Christ’s example, but I am so disillusioned by the Christians I meet that I can not call myself one of them... nor do they particularly seem to want me in their flock.

“God grant me the strength to change the things I can, to accept the things I can’t and the wisdom to know the difference”...the serenity prayer

The music at the Unitarian church was okay, but the spark of seeking God’s face seemed nearly extinguished... if it ever resided there to begin with. The best part of the service was when the guest speaker from the churches birthplace in Transylvania said; come and see us anytime, except when the moon is full unless you bring garlic... at least he had a sense of humor.

I’m guessing that from the beginning of time, the inmates have been running the asylum. Whether it was the ancient shaman, witch doctor or Moses talking to bushes... we’ve always responded better to nuts than to reason.

Just got passed by a car with one of those “real men love Jesus” bumper stickers... I agree with that, but why are so many of them so willing to kill, or at least have their surrogates kill in his name? I’m wonder how he feels about that?

God is great, Gold is good, the future’s uncertain and history tends to repeat itself. Don’t reinvent the wheel, the wisdom of a billion years is in the holy books, lets use it. Even bacteria react like us to light and to other stimuli, things are much the same today as always. Just don’t accept these books wisdom as the absolute truth without analyzing it... there may be errors and the sources may be different than you think.

Chapter - Seven

All religions espouse to some degree, destruction of the competition, the heathen, or the infidel, to insure their own survival and growth. I believe in God most of the time and wish I had the faith to believe all the time. If God is looking over us, I hope and pray for that he grants his people; peace, justice, health and happiness. If you are more sure of things, that's great, if you're less sure, keep searching, if you think you know it all... please shut up.

Love the sinner, hate the sin? How far does it go? Where if anywhere do we draw the line? Can you say you love Osama, but hate his sins? If you are "crazy" enough to say yes, do you mean it and does that make you good? This reminds me, I have heard them say "love the sinner, hate the sin" at church a number of times... I've also heard that same quote attributed to Gandhi... I've also heard the golden rule attributed to Jesus and to Buddha... hmmm.

None of us are what we look like on the outside, *that* is only our book cover.

How can there be peace, until everyone, even the "chosen" people admit that we are all created equal, with equal rights, no special rights, privileges or entitlements above others.

"...Here's a truck stop instead of St. Peters, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah"...REM

There is no way to avoid kneeling before the government beast, except to fight and that is almost certainly a losing proposition. Instead you may choose to colonize the cosmos, but even that won't change human nature, or you can follow Jesus, but is "the" church "his" church?

Hypocrisy often seems directly proportional to self-righteousness... not surprising is it?

There are "shame" societies, such as Japan, where I've heard that they are slightly obsessed with that emotion. The US might be characterized as a "pride" society... we're taught to be proud to be Americans... yet our Bible advises against that trait repeatedly. In Proverbs 16:18, it says "pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."

Every once in a while I've tried to take a serious crack at embracing my society's dominant religion... Christianity, but I can't get past the big grab theory. If *you're* in the book of the lamb and I'm not, then I'm devalued, you might as well have a license to "off" me or any one else who's unwilling to declare they want to join your club. Write me off, write me in, it may matter, it may not, but until, like Ghandi I meet a real Christian, I will likely remain a skeptic. My faith will still be in God, but not the God that the guy in the suit, the robe, sandals or whatever, is trying to "sell" me. My faith will be in the God I look for in the cathedral of the sky. I'll look for the creator in places where his(?) creations freely fly, swim, walk or crawl, but always, in their own way, are singing his praise.

Politics and religion...these "necessary evils", historically have mostly been about taking care of us and ours at the expense of them and theirs. Lots of survivors of 9/11 understandably thank God for their preservation, saying God's hand was there, or God was watching over them. As usual, I wonder about those that died, where was the hand God for them? Where is God's hand when the little children are snatched from their bedrooms to be raped, strangled and left in a ditch? Where is God's hand when innocent children suffer and die of disease? Are you really here, there and everywhere? Are you really listening? Is your plan and purpose really that incomprehensible, or is it all just a capricious numbers game?

My opinion is irrelevant, since it's unlikely that I'll persuade you of anything, that is why I am reluctant to engage in public intercourse on the subject. The Bible says "it", Americans by and large believe "it" and that settles it. Never mind what George W. , Ariel Sharon and "anonymous" said.

Let's talk about the first commandment, "though shalt not kill " or murder as some interpret it. This commandment has been twisted to allow more than just killing in extreme self defense, it has been used to justify killing "them", because they are "who they are" and we hate, fear or covet what is theirs. I think though shalt not kill, should be interpreted to mean though shalt not murder or kill, except in ACTUAL self defense and not because our adversaries are Philistines or some other "unsavory" group.

Organized religions tell you, "this is the way it is"...if we disagree, they advise us, "don't say we didn't warn you"...now you're going to hell. At that point, they may even help you get "there."

If God had made us all simple minded, like my dogs, there would be none of this wondering why we're here, what is the meaning of life and what comes after death... wouldn't we be happier?

Creationism, or "Intelligent Design", in the schools, unconditional support for Israel...it's the same old song and dance. It will not end till this crusade of manifest destiny is over, the Jihad is simply another backlash against it. Power, plunder, conquest, victory, oil, religion, they are all part of the same old "for us", or "against us" mentality that rears its ugly head from time to time (and far too often.) It's especially bad now, since the wall of separation between church and state in American is about as currently about as solid as what's left of the Berlin wall.

I believe in God almost all of the time and in "religion" almost none of the time.

Organized religion has some traits of a protection racket or other criminal enterprise, but people tolerate it - no... they demand it.

I am less ashamed of being descended from apes, than I am of being related to some of the people I know.

It would be nice if the religions of the world would agree to do something good, like stop sending their children to kill each other... is that possible?

Chapter – Eight

I suppose you think that I'm a blasphemer, but I haven't nearly earned the credentials of Copernicus or Galileo.

I agree with the pastor that God uses trials to educate us and blessed are those that trust God, but when you say that your people are chosen and the rest of us are not, you are calling us Goyum, human cattle... that I can't abide.

I'll take a good discussion over a good preaching any day, but I'll admit, he's a pretty good preacher... he can beat a dead horse as well as any man.

Frankly speaking, I'm not encouraged to speak frankly...despite this being a free country. There are undoubtedly repercussions for speaking ones mind.

This time of year, I keep hearing "come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant." I've got no complaint with "triumphant", except that it usually means some poor bugger is getting squashed...whether he deserves it or not.

Any religion that claims it is has an official conduit to God, might as well issue its members a James Bond type "license to kill." Historically that's how such "empowered" people have acted. This describes most religions, since they usually claim to have received revelations that "they" have the exclusive stamp of approval from God. If an individual or a people foregoes the invitation to join the cult, there's usually a chorus of "too bad, so sad", followed by some good old fashioned pillage and plundering by these good people.

Is life after death an oxymoron? You might say only for morons, but I'll speak in terms of the mystery of what, if anything comes after life.

"Church?...I'll take mine outside, I'd rather listen to a red bird singing than a red face crowing, any day."

Give the people what they want... I don't suppose there is any way that organized religion can loose the PR contest. It doesn't matter that their "proof" is by "scientific" standards flimsy and suspect. As long as it's persuasive and convinces the people, that's what seems to matter most. We are basically sheep... scared and

easily led down disastrous paths, unless we have a good Shepard. “Join our team” and have eternal life, as well as increased security during your days on earth, or don’t join and be damned to eternal damnation... not to mention that the powerful will persecute you during your natural life. Which has broader appeal to John and Jane Doe? Which offers the more comforting answers to the flocks’ questions about the meaning of life and what comes after. As long as you “conform”, you’re “set” for life and eternity, if you don’t conform, you’ll be cast out forever, and ever and a day. Not even Hollywood or Madison Avenue can match the great story, all they can do is capitalize on it, make money from it, twist it to further their goals and exploit the people.

If you mix all the races into one, there will still be conflicts due to; religion, economics and ideology. Sadly, the shakeout is here, what will be left after the religious, and cultural wars, who will be left to write the history? Prophecy says it will be the Christians and if that’s true, they will surely write it from their point of view.

Christianity is the ultimate success, who can make war with the techno-military states of Christendom? Peter Spielberg, move over! The stories of ET and Star Wars don’t hold a candle to the passion play of Jesus Christ. Paul of Tarsus may have been the greatest of marketing geniuses, how can you compete with miracles that happened 2,000 years before any type of accurate verification was available? Christianity offers the ultimate carrot, and carries the supreme “stick.” It looks like the future of the earth is Christian.

Once in power, which is what organized religions seem to be after, the “great” religions tend to oppress the outsider, while inviting some of them to become insiders. For most religions, the goals seem to be quantity, not quality, while Judaism, appears to seek quality recruits. What can you bring to the table, so to speak. Are you; rich, famous, beautiful, intelligent or athletic? All three religions seek control, dominion and are constantly making a “grab.” This appeals to the average greedy, needy human, of which each of us can be counted. We all want to be protected, to be on the winning side and Christianity offers the greatest prizes. No one that I can think of can compete with their winning formula, and in the end, “all” will probably be subjugated, for better or for worse. Each enemy will be approached and conquered in a timely manner, and time is no obstacle. Finally the “Christianized” earth *may* live in peace, or turn on itself, or perhaps turn its full energy to “saving” those who may have escaped to outer space.

Only the advent of cheap energy can ensure that the welfare states will live in peace, otherwise competition for energy resources will be fuel for conflicts. Some of the wild cards are Israel, China and Russia... will they play their prophetic Biblical roles? Sometimes the best prophecies are those that don't come true, so pray for the peace of Jerusalem, Cairo, Baghdad, Beijing, NYC etc.

I think we are both striving to be true, but I wonder if we are too interested in victory at any cost? Are you a follower of men who claim to know the truth about God, or are you true to your own search for the truth about God? Certainly it's easier to let someone else do the work for you, and the fact that they claim you are blessed or cursed depending on who's side you're on doesn't encourage independent thinking.

You may be the smartest people in the world, but intelligence does not always translate into wisdom or common sense.

Is 'Christian' America better than the rest of the world? If it is, why have we resorted to war so many times in our history? WWJB? How can the philosophies that promises nothing out of the ordinary, compete with religions that promise things that are out of this world?

Being "anti" the dominant "conservative"fundamentalist churches does not make me "anti" Christian, but you obviously disagree. As far as you are concerned, the fundamentalist churches have a direct line to God... excuse me, but I beg to differ... a few of us find that presumptuous and arrogant

To say that our bodies are "corruptible" is an understatement. Not only do we wither away and deteriorate physically with age, but when a person's dead body is left to the elements, it quickly becomes something that looks akin to road kill. It's only natural that being self aware being, we would pray that there's something more after death, and something better than our old corruptible bodies. Even the most fabulous human bodies inexorably deteriorate and after a period of time in the ground are not much different than the shells of moths that we find stuck to the wall.

The Rain Song

**This is the springtime of my loving-
The second season I am to know**

**You are the sunlight in my growing-
So little warmth Ive felt before.
It isnt hard to feel me glowing-
I watched the fire that grew so low.**

**It is the summer of my smiles-
Flee from me keepers of the gloom.
Speak to me only with your eyes
It is to you I give this tune.
Aint so hard to recognize-
These things are clear to all from
Time to time. ooooh...**

**Talk talk-
Ive felt the coldness of my winter
I never thought it would ever go
I cursed the gloom that set upon us...**

**But I know that I love you so
But I know that I love you so.**

**These are the seasons of emotion
And like the winds they rise and fall
This is the wonder of devotion-
I see the torch we all must hold.
This is the mystery of the quotient-
Upon us all a little rain
Must fall.
Just a little rain?
Ooooh, yeah yeah yeah! ... Led Zeppelin.**

I hope there's a God, I pray there's a God, I believe in God as best I can. I am a regular guy, but sometimes I walk separate from the flock.

I'm for things that may never be...most of all I'm for peaceful coexistence and the sunrise. I embrace the serenity prayer, as it gives me comfort during times of distress.

Grief? In this terrible world, it's all okay. Every day, every breath is a supreme blessing!

I don't have anything profound to say, I just have a few questions that I'd like to ask...I see that as my job.

It seems that everyone on all the opposing sides, wants to have their cake and eat it too...that's pretty normal. Many also think that their world and religious views are superior to others, or that their "adversaries" views on these issues are invalid or irrelevant... this obviously leads to trouble.

I don't care much about; flags, countries, patriotism or organized religions, I just believe in peace, justice and freedom... absurd isn't it? If our hope, faith and belief in salvation or eternal life is wrapped up in religious dogma and so is "the enemy's", then how can this world ever have peace.

You are patriotic, join churches and other groups to be saved, and feel secure, and strong. None of your groups make me feel any of those things... when I attend, I just feel like I'm part of surrounded by a mob at a concert or ball game, cheering for "our side." For better or worse, I am presently standing, or hanging alone. My fallible conscience, mind and human desires guide me they are not to your liking, I suppose you would constrain them... I can't try to as well.

Why am I skeptical about organized religion? Maybe, because regarding their claims, the historical record is weak and there may be mounting evidence against the dogmas.. Much of the historical record may have been destroyed and some has been suppressed (gospel of Thomas etc., council of Nicea etc.) Why is it, that whenever one of the major religions spreads to a new land, the result seems to be; dead natives, riches for the self righteous invaders, cultural destruction and name changes to things like "New" York" or "New" Britain. That's not to say some of the cultures destroyed deserved to be (cannibal and human sacrificers for example), but I think that's been the exception, not the rule. Generally, it's been western invaders with their highly centralized command structures annihilating loose knit tribal societies.

When your self worth and hope for eternal life is wrapped up in a religion's dogma, you will perform for its leaders like a trained dog.

You say this is God's will and that is God's will...I don't know who's will it is, but it's apparent that you will smash those who don't submit to "you." So who do I believe, the pedophile priests, militant; mullahs, rabbis and pastors, or my own fallible conscience?

If nothing else, reactionary governments around the world should serve as a warning about what happens when the separation of church and state is violated. Our generation's witch hunters use high-tech surveillance, pharmaceuticals and psychological abuse more than the thumbscrews and electrical shocks of the developing world. But you will be just as dead from their lethal injection of sodium pentothal as you would be from a rope around your neck or a sword across it.

They're going to church now and Dad is going with them, I was invited too, but said no thanks... I've been to enough of their war rallies. All I really want to know is WWJB (Who Would Jesus Bomb?) Despite their sweet, fancy talk, the reactionary fundamentalist pastors, were in the case of Iraq, the first ones to call for the bomber jets and Tomahawk missiles. Like most of their other "liberations", it was a grab, this time for oil and Judeo Christian dominance. Besides, I've already heard an inspirational message today... courtesy of a little red bird. I appreciate its sweet song much more than the two faced, blood thirsty babbling of the preacher.

The Incas had gold, the American Indians had land and natural resources...they don't anymore...hmmm?

Religion? It's either miraculous... or the most amazing pyramid scheme ever! Omnipotent saviors, prophets or "enlightened ones" who are "capable" of helping or reprimanding billions of people simultaneously... even Santa Claus that busy. I'm not as turned off by the possible contradiction with the laws of physics, as I am by all the money and power garnered by these religions', "earthly representatives". Be careful though, it doesn't take much to make the flock mad enough to blow you to kingdom come... of course it's for your own good, or at least for the "greater good" mind you.

Scribes = bean counters... Pharisees = lawyers... statistics still lie and the law is still an ass...some things never change.

A problem I see with some religions, is that they place little emphasis on justice, or accountability for one's actions and a great deal of emphasis on their god's power to dole out forgiveness. This would not be bad, except that there is little incentive for accountability, when people are taught that as long as they repent of their sins, all of our misdeeds will be automatically forgiven. How many people operate on the assumption, either consciously or unconsciously that they can pretty much do what they want and they'll have time to repent later? That attitude along with ones like "we're better than they are", leads to problems of all sorts. Human government is supposed to fill the gap and religious people are generally instructed

by their leaders to obey the law. In practice, many people don't follow the golden rule because they believe they will be forgiven for anything they do, this leads to no justice... and no peace.

If you can't "check" your religious views at the door, if you think your holy books are the word of God and other's scriptures are man made, opinions, lies or foolishness, then how can we ever have a peaceful world? We're in trouble, because when push comes to shove, most people will join the crusade of "us" against "them" and follow the greedy, malevolent, hate mongers that have spearheaded the devastation of the human race since time began.

If the Israelis are entitled to Palestine, then why aren't the Egyptians due the gold and riches that Moses and Hebrews supposedly took from Egypt when they left.? Think of the interest that would have accrued b now!

I've never met anyone who's been to the other side, but darn near everyone I know has an opinion about it and some claim to have all the answers...I'm more than a bit skeptical of their claims. I was raised to be skeptical of religious claims and dogmas, while most of my acquaintances, were raised to accept the churches teachings... many it seems were taught that it's very wrong to question the religious authorities.

The only thing holy about the church is that their stories, morals and intentions are completely full of holes.

Interfere minimally...help as you can...do no harm.

Most of the world's Muslims, and Christians are not violent reactionaries or zealots. It's too bad that the small minorities within these two religions, have been able to foment so much anger and violence and have brought the world to the brink of catastrophe.

I was raised to believe there is always hope for peace, compromise and reconciliation, even for the most difficult situations. There are some cases however, where a happy ending may be almost an impossible dream... that is why we should all be dreamers...

The caller to the conservative talk show said he couldn't understand how some people couldn't understand and support Bush junior's war on the terrorism. He said he just wanted to clobber such people and the host agreed. Well, if I don't believe your view of what is "Gods word", then why should I support your crusade to convert or conquer the "heathen" world? Of course your Christian gospel is

compelling and the story line remarkable, the wisdom profound and the prophecies chilling, but I'm still not surrendering to the "church"... it seems to me to just be people with a self serving agenda.

Few are inclined to argue too strongly, when faced with the curses and damnation the religionists promise to heap upon the un-saved...it is a powerful incentive to toe the line and do what the "anointed" leaders tell us to do. I must say, that in the rewards department, Christianity is fittingly challenged, by other religions promises of paradise, nirvana etc. Christianity's apparent description of heaven as being the saved souls endlessly singing praises to God, sounds a bit tiring and bit like the plight of North Koreans relentlessly having to praise Kim Jong Il... As far as burning bushes, talking donkeys and millions of critters on an arc, judge for yourself, but I'm a bit skeptical.

Christians... if you are to convert the heathens, do it with good works, positive examples and wisdom, not with bombs and braggadocio. When you are done with the Moslems, will you move on to others that you call heathens? Is anyone safe and when there are no others to convert or conquer, will you find fault with each other... will it be like Ford versus Chevy.

Moslems, please give women equal rights, but not more rights than you have... like we have done in the west. Stop terrorizing your own people, stop torturing people, stop female genital mutilation, stop honor killing of your women, make the veil truly voluntary...do these things and maybe God will smile on you. Is it not inevitable that those who won't change a little from within, are eventually changed forcibly by outsiders?

I think the veil and fundamentalism in general is to some extent a reaction to western abuse of Middle Eastern peoples, but in my opinion, it is most unfortunate. After World War One, the Arab world could have been poised for success but that potential was undermined by the west's self-serving policies towards the region. The western powers commercial ambitions and the Zionist's colonial intrusions made the tribes and nations ripe to embrace Islamic fundamentalism. For their part, the Arabs were too divided to mount any effective defense... instead greedy leaders and disinterested populaces were overwhelmed by the armies of the west.

If crusaders, like; Napoleon, Brits, French and American armies were not constantly stomping around the Middle East, perhaps the Prophets people would not constantly be on a war footing. Being half Arab and possibly less biased than our government and I find it natural that strong men have ruled the Middle

East... but their excesses have been tragic, if not un-natural. Being subject to constant invasion, what else would you expect than a constant war footing and something a kin to martial law? It's tragic, but not surprising, that tyrannical governments, such as secular Saddam and the reactionary house of Saud have sprouted. up and have flourished in a sick kind of way. The west, Israel and the Arabs have created a mess of Biblical and historic proportions in the Middle East.... the only question I have is where will it lead?

First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for the Communists
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Communist.
Then they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out
because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for me
and there was no one left
to speak out for me...
Pastor Martin Niemöller

If you take the high road and oppress no one, do you have a better chance of being blessed by God? I hopeso. I was baptized and asked Jesus to be my personal savior, but must admit my faith in the Christian "religion" is weak. Faith in a God, who is good, just and all powerful is what I fall back on in times of trial and tribulation. I believe that the God of the universe is invincibly strong and hopefully willing enough to save all decent people, not just select or chosen people.

Christ taught his disciples to love their enemy...the church endorses that... but if the "enemy" doesn't come around, the church encourages its flock to give him heck.

Preacher man's always saying, "that old devil made him do this, or that old devil did that." I wonder if the preacher and his flock are right, or are wrong? Is it the random statistical probability, human error, greed, malice and carelessness, that cause these problems? I don't know, but I'm thinking of an example right now that relates to probability. I was riding my bike on a quiet country road for a stretch of $\frac{3}{4}$ or a mile, there were no cars to be seen and I took my hands off the bars to rest my arms. That's when I'm most vulnerable, because I tend to weave a bit, including into the middle of the street. While doing this, I listen especially

carefully for any cars that might come up behind me, so I can put my hands back on the bars and get over to the right. Of course a car comes up behind me as I'm riding no handed and I make my adjustment. The problem is that, when the car passes me I mistakenly think that once again I'm alone. What happens though, if another car comes up behind me now? The chances are I wouldn't hear it because the car that "passed" me is still making some noise. If I take my hands off the bars, weave and get run over, was it my fault or the devils?

I believe in God most of the time, but I have my doubts when you tell me that he says go forth and kill...mostly I doubt his "messengers." There's something about messengers, why do they usually tell us about messes?

Leave your dog and your dogma at home or at the door if you would like to come in and join us at the table. If you want to blow smoke or proselytize, do so outside...there is a yard for that...just watch where you step, there's also a dog. In this house I would like for dialogue and reason to hold sway...just don't expect miracles.

Why would anyone try to engineer world history? Actually it's probably a natural and irresistible urge for intelligent and energetic people, but that doesn't mean its right. What percentage of Americans donate money to, or visit the country of their ancestors?

You accuse me of trying to intellectualize things, of being a doubting Thomas, of sitting on the fence, you say Jesus will spit me out, because he despises these things. I wonder if that's true, or are these just more threats designed to keep the people in line and too afraid to question church leaders? You have the best threats and those threats have kept the troops of your "holy army" in line for thousands of years...congratulations!

I have "heard" that God may punish entire peoples and this makes sense to some extent, especially if they are committing heinous acts...human sacrifice etc. I've heard it alluded to, that the Aztecs for example, deserved to be deposed for that reason... I'm not sure what they were doing when the Spanish invaded. What about the other natives of the Americas? What were they doing that was so bad? Yes, there was tribal warfare, but I'm not sure they were doing anything worse than what was going on in Europe at the time.

Chapter – Nine

Just caught something on TV the other day, the guy was talking about Christianity's triumphs and benefits and mentioned that thanks to Christianity, cannibalism had been eliminated world wide. I'm glad if that's true, but I wonder just how much of a problem cannibalism was to "the world?" I also wonder if things are much better for those people now and what, if anything they have given up or lost? I hear that Port Moseby in New Guinea, a country that until recently had cannibalism, is one of the most dangerous cities on earth, but I guess they don't eat people there anymore... just murder them.

Somone criticized my dinner prayer and said it sounded insincere, but you know very little about when, why and how I pray. On the other hand, some people are very public with their prayers... Does that make their prayers "better" than those of other people? Is God listening to yours and not to mine... you have no idea where, when, what and how I'm praying and I'd like to keep it that way.

Someone criticized the Unitarian church when they were offended by it said they were all going to Hell. If I say that I think *your* church is a travesty and run by war mongers, I'm likely to be tarred, feathered and rode out of town on a rail.

Christianity is laden with wonderful promises, it is also full of what you call warnings, and I what call incredibly nasty and effective threats. I'll spit you out if you're lukewarm, blessed are those that believe, but do not see and of course the old reliable, if you don't believe you're damned eternally....that's a mind blower. It's perfect for quelling dissent and nipping debate in the bud... for most people... I'm not saying that Jesus didn't preach these things... but I'm not saying he did either, at least hopefully not in the context you now present them.

If I was born in a Muslim country, would I secretly be writing about the "wrongs" that I'd surely see around me. If caught, I might loose my freedom, be tortured or killed. Here I'm am less likely to loose my freedom or be killed, but just as likely to just loose friends if I write publicly. Both types of societies control their people fairly effectively - via force, intimidation and brutality over there and by force, intimidation the tax code, and a myriad of other societal "penalties" over here. It appears though, that as the war on terrorism heats up, the U.S. government is adapting similar "extra-legal" means of intimidating people into watching what

they say. In both societies, the media is largely a tool of the elite...over there, it appears to be unabashedly biased and controlled by the leaders. Here it's more open, but still controlled by the alphas...they do a good job of convincing people the press is free, and that in itself is a method of mind control.

I'd probably trust Jesus a lot more if there was no church associated with him. I don't know if I believe in the virgin birth and the resurrection, there's little more evidence of that, then there is for Moses' burning bush, Noah's arc, or Paul's talking donkey. I do "believe in" many of the sayings attributed to him, others I'm not so sure about... after all, I'm not a Bible scholar and I'm more than a little bit rusty in the scriptures. Was Mary immaculately impregnated by God, or was Jesus' father actually; Joseph, aliens, Pantera the Roman or someone else...who knows!? Meanwhile, wouldn't the immaculate conception story be a good way to dispel any rumors that Mary had an affair or worse? As far as virgin birth being unique to the Bible, I am told that it had already appeared elsewhere prior to the old and new testaments. If the young Jesus was told this version of events by his mother, perhaps he'd embrace the notion, his followers probably did as well ... I find it barely plausible. As far as believing his apostles, I see them more like modern day TV evangelists than as reliable sources of information. The whole thing smacks of Hollywood and Madison avenue.

Heaven let your light shine down... that's a pretty cool song!

You're against drinking, but the Bible says Jesus turned water into wine. The apologists say the water wasn't clean back then, so they had to drink a "weak" type of wine. If Jesus could turn water into wine, couldn't he also have purified the water? If drinking is wrong, surely Jesus wouldn't have turned water into wine... would he?

Christianity may be an excellent moral compass in general, but in my humble opinion, its not be perfect. I hesitate to say even that, because every religion has some marauding zealots who believe they will receive eternal blessings for silencing anyone who is critical of their faith. Challenging the powers that be, is a game for martyrs, not for normal folks... and I *think* I'm pretty normal.

Converting one to your religion is like any other rah, rah game or team sport. "Our savior is the best!", they exclaim. "Join our team and you'll get eternal life, but if you join their team, you'll be damned." "We're chosen, we're redeemed, we're saved, we're the best, we're going to win, they're all going to hell...rah, rah, sis boom bah!" Some things never change.

Yesterday a well known televangelist was in the news, this time for suggesting there was merit to the idea of killing the president of Venezuela. Just another example of his true feelings and probably not unlike many in his flock. He wants the Ten Commandments posted in public venues, but he seems to want to interpret “thou shall not kill” as he sees fit. You wonder why I don’t like to go to “our” local church? Between their general agreement with the aforementioned televangelist and their war rallies on the Fourth of July, I simply can’t stomach the place... grand as it is. They might distance themselves a bit from the televangelist on his statement, but I believe that is nothing but subterfuge... and the result of testing the winds.

Where is the line between anti-Semitism and the right to criticize the actions of the Israeli government? Maybe it’s when critical words incite violence, but I’ve seen it defined much broader than that... It’s plain to me that the slur “anti-Semite” is used to; marginalize the opposition, frame debates, silence dissenters and destroy the credibility of anyone who is not “on board.”

Yes, what Hitler did ranks up there as one of most heinous crimes in human history, but do the Jewish people ever ask themselves - why so many countries expelled them? If you always come up with the same answers; jealousy, corruption etc. then I doubt you are digging very deep.

At Sharm al Sheik, NPR’s guest reported that Bush told Mahmoud Abas (former Palestinian PM) that God told him to attack Al Qaeda, and then to attack Iraq. This was supposedly leaked to the press and printed in Harretz newspaper. Bush reportedly also said that if God hadn’t intervened, he would be sitting in a bar in Texas and that he wasn’t too sure he should run for pres., because his family wasn’t so much for it...but God told him to run. I wonder if it was God talking to GW, or something else...

I am quite human, fragile, frail and flawed. I have no special insight or knowledge, just a singular viewpoint. I mostly ask questions and raise issues...I’m not as good at providing answers. Some people are keen to provide the answers and claim to have the inside scoop... I think they’re full of you know what.

They will do anything to get their way and you will do “what ever is necessary” to get your way. You both want to win so much, that you’re willing to destroy everything in sight to do so. After all your holy books and their holy books seem to tell both of you to kill each other. Ask the innocents of wounded knee, Hiroshima,

Nagasaki, Dresden etc., etc. how loving “your” God is.... By the way, I’m not confusing “your” God with God.

If you don’t change for the better from the inside, you will usually be changed from the outside. Does that mean that God has ordained the change, that people have, or that the intelligence of the universe has? I don’t know the answer... I’m just making a general observation.

Religions that offer their members “special” status, such as being chosen, saved or superior are the top sellers in the marketplace for “souls.” It’s not surprising that their strategy of promising heaven for believers and hell for un-believers, has worked so well for so long...not surprising and not very funny. The reactionaries never stop “agitating”, they’re constantly trying to convert everyone and their dog. Well, they might save one of us, but my dog worships anyone who’ll regurgitate a little meat in his direction. We humans seem to require just a bit more in order to be “saved”, like promises of glory and power... which by the way, they offer in abundance, along with some pretty nasty threats to those that don’t acquiesce.

Your priests, mullahs, rabbis, pastors and the like have kept the human race stirred up like angry hornet since pre-history...if these maniacs are not disarmed, there will be no future history. I’m not for silencing them, just for getting their fingers off the trigger and hopefully their influence back to a manageable level.

When you’re taught that God has declared you better than others... how can you live in peace with your neighbors? When you have been instructed to give the “heathens” a chance to convert and to treat them roughly if they don’t, what hope is there for peace? When only your religion holds the truth and you show no respect for other points of view...what hope for peace is there?

I don’t know how many times I’ve heard “good Christians” say things like:,

- 1. As per Afghanistan and Iraq... the only thing wrong is that we didn’t kill enough of them... friends and relativesw.**
- 2. Foreign heads of state should be assassinated... televangelist.**
- 3. I just want to take them and shake some sense into them Church go-er about Arabs.**
- 4. The oil “shortage” is OPECs fault... average people.**

5. Those filthy Arabs... “salt of the earth” Americans.

6. Those dirty rag heads... ditto

7. Kill them all... ditto

8. Just nuke them... ditto

When on the most fundamental level, you’re entire system is based on “exclusive” religions, when it carries over to “our team is better than their team” in sports and you imprint kids with false mythology like Santa Claus from the very beginning, then how can we expect honesty from anyone? When history, archeology and science are relegated to the back seat by those controlling the masses, there’s not much hope for justice and peace.

One reason people get so upset if religion is criticized, is that most religions teaches that we are not animals... we are, religion teaches, better and higher than the animals. I won’t argue that we’re higher than animals, and better... we’ll who knows, but if we thought we weren’t higher or better than them, we might feel bad about treating them the way we do. I’m not saying that we shouldn’t eat them, although many people say that, I do however think that we should treat them well and not be cruel to animals... of course there are different views about what is cruelty to animals. If I make my dog sleep outside in the rain, but in a dog house , some people will consider that cruel. If I make it sleep outside in the cold and it has only a very light coat, like a Boston Terrier for example and it shivers all night, most people would consider that cruel. The point is that if we are taught that we are better than animals, it’s a little bit easier to justify poor treatment and eating them. If animals are “equal” to us, if we are no higher than the beasts, then how can we in good conscience eat them?

I don’t expect or want to be your conscience or vice versa. Often we discount others consciences or say, “he doesn’t have one.” In a very few cases that may be true, but for the most part, it’s a matter of whether or not we agree with the other guy. If we don’t, then it’s common to say *he* or *she* shouldn’t trust their conscience or feelings, because a higher power says that things should be a certain way. Problem is, the “other” person may feel guided by a higher power too... maybe the same one you are appealing to.

I shouldn't call them phony, but the smiles in church this Sunday morning seem contradicted by the lines of sternness that are permanently etched on these faces. Yes, much of the lines come from hard lives, catastrophes and personal tragedies, but I'm guessing that a fair amount of the scowl lines come from uncalled for anger towards others... I'm afraid that I've got them too. There is so much potential in each man and woman here, but too often there is so little positive result...and yes, of course that includes me.

One of the songs they were singing, went something like, "my heart cries out for me to follow you." I see a battle between the heart crying out for that and the brain, genes, hormones and flesh crying out to do what it thinks you must do to "survive." I see a church full of people as good and as bad as the non-church population, *maybe* they're better off, *maybe* they have more potential for good, but I see little evidence of their succeeding in doing a *good* work, or of even trying harder than "heathens" in that department. Like people everywhere, they are trying to get rich, get by, or just successfully raise the kids.

The pastor told a little story about a "little Jewish girl" who wanted to give a Valentine to Osama Bin Laden, and to start a movement of children doing the same - eventually softening his heart. If he had stopped there the story would have been nice, but he had to have a punch line...she tells her Dad, that once he comes out into the open, the marines can really "let him have it." Bin Laden has made his bed and now must lay in it, I think it's unfortunate that other "generals" like Bush and Sharon don't have similar worries. The pastor's joke reminds me how many times I have seen the vengeful side of the American people and their desire to vanquish people who live far away.

Next the pastor talked about Mel Gibson's new movie, "The Passion", the church had rented out a movie theatre to see it en mass. The media might be there, he told the congregation...carry yourselves as Christ would want you to. They are worried about anti-Semitism being stirred up by the movie, but I wonder if they really have anything to worry about. At this time in American history, the Jewish people are perceived as being so solidly on the "right" side of history, that I doubt anyone would turn on them. I expect "The Passion" will simply help the church solidify their position against who they see as the "real" enemies of the church...you know who – the Muslims!

Yes, yes, yes... you claim you'll live forever, because that is God's "gift" to the faithful. It is a wonderful promise, but all I *feel* like I know, is that we end up as dry bones and *maybe* the faithful be it you, them or us will go to Heaven.

Meanwhile, your actions speak louder than your words, you still support or rationalize mega murder of civilians (Hiroshima, Dresden, Viet Nam, Iraq etc.) all in the name of things like WMDS that haven't been found, freedom, democracy and love. To this observer, it looks like there's been the usual "wink and nod", between the elitists and the collective hope that we'll get our hands on 25% of the worlds oil.

I don't have the slightest idea what God's will is, but I would be amazed if he gave the Muslims peace and prosperity while they continue to brutalize their own people. I would also be surprised if he continues to grant peace and prosperity to the Christians while they brutalize *other* people. I hope that both groups consider changing their ways and maybe they'll find these good things.

You might be saying that I'm a blasphemer and heretic. I think I'm just an independent person seeking the truth in my own way. I don't accept; pastors, popes, imams, rabbis or anyone else as my spiritual leader... as they have not demonstrated much credibility. I would love to find like minded people to seek the truth with, but they seem a bit hard to come by. I just don't automatically accept our leaders version of history, or religion. I do not feel compelled to sit through these weekly (or even more frequent) indoctrination sessions that so many of my cult member friends seem to enjoy so much.

I know that I'm a sinner and unworthy...I ask God to save me if he will... Amen. Women and men are attracted to religion for many of the same reasons as well as for some different reasons. Both want eternal life and that may be the biggest reason for embracing ones faith. After that, both want security on earth which for men means things like dominion over other men, women, neighbors and heathen nations. Women may desire security, equality with men and dominion over others too, but they seem a bit less concerned with dominion over neighboring lands...they let the men take care of that chore.

Religion seems primarily moral codes, clashing dogmas and power struggles between different cultures, or ethnic groups. It is also often the "certifying" authority, whose stamp of approval is sought when the powerful want to annihilate neighbors, or "heathens" who have something they want.

Religion is even worse than politics these days...at least in politics you're given a choice of two parties. In religion they don't even give you that choice, maybe you can choose between denominations, but you have to join their religion... or else!

I was not consulted regarding whether or not our daughter should be allowed to watch the R rated movie “The Passion of the Christ.” Did you think I’d say no, or was it just none of my business? Apparently, the pastor made that decision for his flock, he seems to have decided the movie would convey *useful, important* information... I resent having to take a back seat to him and *colleagues*, did I mention that I resent that you give him money every week that is used to undermine what little influence I have left on my children? Did I tell you that I resent that when you come home from church, it seems taken for granted, that I have been home wasting my time.... Oh well, maybe I’m being hypersensitive. Should I mention that I don’t think going to *that* church is useful, but instead is weekly indoctrination into the dominant NWO cult? No, I probably shouldn’t mention that.

Under subtle *persuasion* (read – duress), I was invited to join the Bible study for Rick Warren’s book, Forty Days of Purpose. Here are my thoughts about it at the time... (about two years ago.) He sold millions of copies and may be poised to be the next Billy Graham, he’s also made some interesting overtures to “liberals”, which have not been particularly well received by his “base.” I’m glad to see him making such overtures and trying not to be suspicious of his intentions.

Chapter 1

Here’s the short version of how I felt...it was fine. Now for the long version... Mostly it was okay, it made sense, it was mostly things I’ve heard before and basically agree with. Still my impression was neutral at best, because I think Warren’s building up to the usual ‘we’re right and everyone else is wrong’ grande finale. I’m trying to give him the benefit of the doubt, but it’s tough. I’m being asked to be open minded and consider his version of things... i.e. that the Bible is the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth and the only truth. I wonder if Warren would consider my opinions valid or that other versions of history have merit. I’m sorry, but even a novice in Biblical archeology and history, can see that there might be another side. I am not a robot or zombie and do not appreciate his methods.

Chapter 2

Okay, I guess.

Chapter 3

It started out okay, but eventually ruffled my feathers. Call me cynical, but I keep thinking that despite all the sweetness, Rick Warren has an agenda that I can't support. Save our souls, convert the heathen? I see the bottom line as boiling down to conquer the "infidels." I agree there's a lot of wisdom in this chapter, but I'm tired of it being shoved down my throat as the only wisdom, the only truth and I'm tired of the implied threats (damnation if you don't join our side and fight the good fight.) From my point of view, Warren's not just part of the solution, instead he's also part of the problem...just like the rest of us.

Chapter 4

Same old, same old, Warren say's, "tragically, many people will have to endure eternity without God..." and, "if your time on earth were all there is...I'd suggest you start living it up." It's the same old platitudes and threats, he never gets past them, but then again, they're some of the best arguments he has. In the end, "your faith" doesn't seem as different from the ancient Egyptians hope for eternal life as you make it out to be. Life after death involves universal questions, fears, desires and you're just spinning it to "your teams" advantage. It's all rah, rah, sis boom bah, win, win, win and we're number one! I would no more buy after life insurance from Warren than I'd buy a used car from him...but I'll admit he's one heck of a salesman. You alternate between prodding, pitying, attacking and insulting me for being what you call an unbeliever, a fence sitter etc. At the moment, I'm content to be neither of those and *if* a label is required, am happy to call myself an independent. I still believe a person can seek the truth about God and the universe with the help of researchers, scholars, theologians and regular folks other than Mr. Warren and his posse.

Chapter 5

Regarding page 42 of Warren's book, I agree we should challenge conventional wisdom and agree that often the Bible offers good alternatives. In other instances, I think that the Bible offers only flawed, conventional wisdom...oh well. I do not admire, respect or relate to Mr. Warren...I do not trust him to be my religious guide and I do not see him as God's spokesman in any way. Still on page 42, Warren says "authoritatively" that life is a temporary assignment, maybe the Bible and Warren are right about this (I hope so), but then again maybe they're wrong. I'm still trying to figure out how I can accept on faith, that Noah and his family fed (and presumably cleaned up after) 60 thousand types of beetles (this number comes from Warren in one of his videos.) This doesn't even touch on the subject of the more than 200 species of rodents... did Noah save the rats... nice guy!

At that rate there must have been millions of critters on the arc to take care of, I'm informed of course it could easily have been done "miraculously." Then there is the talking donkey, burning bush, and any number of other "miraculous" goings on in the Bible. You remind that, those who don't understand, yet believe are blessed and vice versa...all I can say is "whatever" and then I'd better duck! Faith may be the answer, but it might also be the question. I agree with the Bible that life is like a test and that character is developed and revealed by tests, trials and tribulations ...that much is good stuff!

The last paragraph of the chapter sounds a lot like it was copied *by* the Bolsheviks, but I don't hold that against the Bible...they were just capitalizing on it like everyone else. You say I'm hard hearted, but who's voting for leaders that drop bombs on civilians? Not me! Oh... I forgot it's for a good cause, or in self defense or "something"...it's also 5,000 miles away...NIMBY at it's best. Your credibility is not very high with me, which is inconsequential, but there are over a billion people who question your credibility Mr. Warren...*they* are "damned" fools *you* might say.

Why should the guy whose land is about to be taken at sword point believe the guy who straggled out of the desert and said "God gave me this land!" Just out of curiosity, was God talking from a burning bush, a cloud in the sky or perhaps out of a donkeys mouth? Would you be willing to give your property to someone who claims to be chosen and tells you such a story? "What!" you say... "don't you know that we have 'the truth' and if you don't believe in 'the truth', you are damned?" Yes, yes, I have already been informed of my rights, thank you very much.

In most societies, religious reactionaries wield considerable political and economic power, much greater than their numbers would suggest possible. They are well organized, single minded in their goals and unlike the "average man" more likely to be sober.

When the Noah story so closely parallels the supposedly older Epic of Gilgamesh, when many proverbs are so similar to supposedly older Egyptian and Sumerian proverbs, when suppressed Gnostic gospels tell a somewhat different story, when powerful individuals like Constantine pressured religious leaders at councils like Nicea to canonize *their* Bible...why should I believe *the* Bible *they* came up with is God's inerrant word?

You may be looking for salvation, a personal relationship with God and peace of mind, but your leaders seem to be looking for power, influence and now days - oil. Their words are sometimes lofty, but their actions are usually more banal. It reminds me of what Mohandas Gandhi said... “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ” and, “What do I think of Western civilization? I think it would be a very good idea.”

I wonder if I can believe in freedom of religion and not object to controls on proselytizing? It seems to me that even though the best message is likely to win, it may also be true that those with the most money *may* have an unfair advantage.

I have been very critical of their actions and motives, but I can’t argue that the U.S. and other countries that have historically aided them, seem to have been blessed by God, or at least have prospered. Do we already know the outcome of the battle between the Christians and their “enemies” as the Bible tells us we do? Does the end justify the means...will these chosen people continue to be blessed because they have kept their covenant with God? Who knows... certainly not me.

Organized religion provides evidence that most people, in addition to wanting what’s good for their loved ones, are mean, stupid and selfish. Just critically read Tim LeHay, or critically watch the Passion of the Christ by Mel Gibson...

The more I get to know the religious people around me and learn about the history and origins of their religions. The more I think they are the robotic, brainwashed members of the world’s dominant mystery cults. I am not “enlightened”, or “knowledgeable” enough to comment on the divinity of their holy men. It would not surprise me though, if Jesus for example was a historical person who preached a beautiful message and was crucified for it. It also would not surprise me if his ministry was hijacked after his death and used for as much evil as good. The holy men of other religions, I have read even less about, but would guess they’re lives might have been a bit like Christ’s.

I’m not suggesting renouncing any aspect or dogma of your religion, not even the part about being chosen above all other peoples by God. I’m just respectfully requesting that all great peoples, consider treating the rest of mankind as equals... many of them already do.

You may vanquish your “enemies”, you may conquer the world, you may win, win, win...but that does not necessarily mean that you are right. You just think you are

righteous, but because you are human, it's debatable whether or not you are even on God's side... it's questionable that *anyone* is *properly* doing God's work.

“And they asked me if I would

Do a little number

And I sang with all my might

She said

'Tell me are you a Christian'

I said 'Ma'am I am tonight'”...Marc Cohn – Walking in Memphis

Chapter - Ten

The nation's a team, your religion's a team, your school's a team, your family's team, your gang of friends is a team. We are social beings and do much better as members of a team, than as lone wolves... teamwork is a great thing, unfortunately the other side of the coin is that teams are usually out to beat other "teams."

When our local church protests the war and demands an end to the killing, bombing, maiming and destruction, I will be anxious to take a second look at it. Up to this point, I have mostly seen war rallies there. You tell me it's my loss not theirs and you may be right... meanwhile don't bother holding the door for me.

We keep forgetting that two wrongs do not make a right...again and again and again –we forget. You've asked me to join the Bible study... Why? So you can have some one there to call the "devils advocate"...no thanks. I can't control your use of that invective against me, but I will most likely be in absentia when you do so.

Just a closer walk with thee...I would like to have a closer walk with; Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha and other "enlightened" individuals... sorry if my choices aren't up to your standards.

People and events seem to be pushing us towards being more radical. I'm trying to remember that human nature and history has always been tragic, so I might resist the urge to be too extreme.

I asked about the "list" of things you have to believe, or do, to be a Christian. I mentioned to him that the list seems to change and eventually get longer the more you delve into it. It reminds me of "free introductory offers", it sounds so "easy" at first, but then you run into more and more fine print. I was informed that the short list is for "baby" Christians and the longer one is for "mature" Christians. I'm told something to the effect that 'baby" Christians just have to; believe Jesus died for their sins, ask him to be their personal savior and believe in his resurrection. Mature Christians - it seems, have to belong to the right church, right political party, support the idea of global Christendom, etc., etc. It seems to

me that the more “mature” one is, the more likely one is to say send in the bomber jets.

There are hundreds of varieties of; rats, squirrels, rabbits, monkeys, beetles etc. Did Noah collect and care for two of each variety or just one representative of each species in general? If he took them all, there would literally be millions of animals that he and his family of ten or so would have to feed and clean up after... Oh well, maybe they received help cleaning cages and stalls from angels or there might have been other miracles. If he took only two representatives of each general species...how did all the varieties develop after the flood...surely they didn't “evolve” did they? Too bad he saved two rats of whatever variety caused the Bubonic plagues of the middle ages... I guess he didn't do that on purpose. Anyway, I would be surprised that our great and loving God would unleash such plagues... nature on the other hand might be so cold hearted.

It's all about power and control over people, as well as, greed, coveting scarce resources and shoving one's own beliefs down other peoples throats. May there be peace and justice, may God's will be done... and may we all someday just learn to get along with each other.

Oh, for the good old days when I saw young evangelicals on campus for the first time. Back in those days, on the campus I was on, they were often viewed as Jesus “freaks”... today, they seem to have taken over the government and the thin veil separating church and state is at risk of being ripped to shreds.

I don't really want to go the church with the relatives this Sunday, but it's one of those “special” days and the women will be happier if we all attend. I'm not looking forward to the usual war rally, which seems to be a part of most services at “our” church. I will go there cheerfully and will add *one more* prayer for peace... hopefully not the only one... Although fairly diplomatic in choosing his words, it sounds to me as if the pastors prayer is for just one thing “victory!” His focus seems to be on conquering “evil” and vanquishing the “heathen enemy.” Of course there's always the implied caveat that if they unconditionally surrender and join the “right” side, they will be forgiven, possibly become prosperous and enjoy eternal life, instead of burning forever.

I might be completely wrong about some things, or about everything, in any case I know I'm not right about everything. However, I will resist your efforts to correct, control or “reform” me... after all, you might be wrong sometimes too... *even* in your interpretation and “understanding” of God's will.

There may be people who are impossible to reach, I'm not particularly trying to affect them... perhaps history and events will deal with them. I know there is something far greater than us in the universe...many of us call that force God.

When I go to "our" church and listen to the pastor's subtle yet effective jingoism, I wonder, am *I* the only one there praying for peace and not just for victory... or are there others there too, silently praying a similar prayer? Are our messily little voices cancelled and trumped by the vast majority of parishioners who I *think* are praying for victory, conquest and death to the infidels?

A while back, a former CIA agent who went by the pseudonym "Anonymous" made the rounds, promoting his book, that said Bush was playing right into Bin Ladin's hands. I think "Anonymous" said we must kill as many people, including civilians as it takes, to break the back of militant Islam. I interpret this to mean the west should pursue a Sherman like policy of total war against the Arabs, until they submit to America's will... Again, I wonder WWJB?

I'm not an atheist, but I think their point of view deserves as much respect as much as anyone else's. It's think that like most other religions, Judaism allows people to convert and become one of the "chosen people." I'm not sure they make it as easy as most other religions... maybe they want quality, not quantity.

Too many churches and not enough truth...too many people and not enough eyes to see...the Guess Who.

An interesting thing about Judaism, is that you can chose to be one of the "Chosen People." I'm not sure what you have to do to become Jewish and to therefore become "chosen." I don't think it's as easy as in Christianity – nor am I sure how Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or other major religions go about "admitting" new converts.... .. Hi, I'm back and I've Googled the above question – I've read that to become a Jew, you have to be considered by a "beis din" (a Jewish court of law) made up of three men qualified to serve on such a court. The site I was reading stated that Judaism doesn't necessarily *encourage* conversion, but it apparently allows it.

An observation that I would like to make, is that most of the people I've heard about converting to Judaism seem to be people of "means" or celebrities. It seems like the Jewish gene pool continues to be invigorated by "substantial" people, not

so much by the riff-raff or “dregs”, that other religions seems happy to “admit” ... for what that’s worth.

Now for slogans, the Jews have “we’re the chosen people” and the Christians have “we’re not better, just better off.” What have Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or other major religions come up with in the marketing department? Jewish people, you are people of the book... heck you wrote the book. We are also people of the book, can’t we somehow live together peacefully?

I believe in God most of the time, especially when I’m in trouble. Americans supposedly believe in God more so than people in other developed nations. Maybe it’s because we get ourselves in more trouble than other “civilized” people. I’m not saying we’re more spiritual than others, we just seem to get in trouble more often.

Getting back to Americans believing in God more than other nationalities, I’m not sure that’s true... maybe it should be rephrased, “Americans seem to believe in the “God of the Bible” more than other people.” That goes along with more Americans seeming to like making a “show” of public prayer and announcing their religiosity more than most other nationalities. These highly visible Christians seem to think that Christ was joking when he said to pray in the closet.

Some “high visibility” Christians also *seem* to think that God listens exclusively, or at least more so, to them, because “they” are doing “his” work. You say that you are loyal to Jesus, but I see you as loyal to a man made institution called the “church.” To this observer, the “church’s” goal seems to have always been control, conquest, victory over its “enemies” and carrying away the spoils of war. Meanwhile, I see you as willing to throw me to the lions, since I am not of your flock, so how can we have a great relationship, when we have a history like that? Heck, isn’t it the book of Genesis that says *my* people are like a “wild ass of a man?” If that’s true, how can you expect me to be a “decent” person and if the scripture is biased or incorrect on that point, how can you expect me to accept its teachings and authority?

I don’t *like* much of what they preach, I don’t believe *some* of what they teach and since it’s a free country, with all due respect - why should I go to such a church? Not that anyone cares, but by going to your church for all these years, I have inadvertently given it my stamp of approval... at least to my children. I should not have done that, so I will protest now...better late than never!

Many have been taught that their religion is right, all others are wrong and that the rest of the world is damned if they don't convert...sorry, but I do not believe that. I hate to be the one to say it folks, but I think all your saviors and prophets may have just been "people"... men and women, not Gods. By the way, I know that I am a sinner, need to repent and do so... at the very least, I believe that.

I think there's a high probability that life begins at conception and that something very special happens at or around the time that the sperm and egg join and exchange DNA. I wouldn't try and force that belief on a pregnant woman who wants an early term abortion. When it comes to mid or late term abortions, I have no problem with preventing the medical establishment from performing abortions. If you say, back alley abortions will become common, or that the rich will be able to go elsewhere, I can only say I'm truly sorry and hope those women considering an abortion (especially a late term one) will put their babies up for adoption if they "can't" raise them...

I will not go to your church...I am unlikely to go to any organized church...you can respect my decision or not. You can spout off all you want, that you are "spiritual" and I'm not...in both cases, I disagree with you. Oops, I did it again, despite my intent not to go to your church, I've probably been there ten times since I wrote the above sentence.

I've heard about people who believe that when they're born, it's really death and when they die it's rebirth... hmm?

You go to church every Sunday, and you listen and "learn." From the beginning you listened with your ears open, mouth shut and it seems, believed everything they told you. After all, they warned, if you didn't "believe", if you questioned too much, you wouldn't go to Heaven. It's not surprising that you believed, after all, it sounds like the best deal in town. I listened to the promises and threats about heaven, hell and the "fact" that they were right and everyone else was wrong and that anyone who didn't convert would be eternally damned... it has scared me, but it has not convinced me of anything other than that the church was founded by a bunch of power hungry men... not by men of God.

The constant talk about power and glory, dominion and victory sent up warning flags in my mind. It smelled fishy and despite their claims that it was God's power and victory, the church always seemed to reward themselves with some one else's abundance. In the old days it was usually land or gold, now it seems to be oil, control of pipeline routes or various commercial contracts. When I saw our old

pastor encouraging the young children to try and talk in tongues and later saw the current pastor seemingly enraged when losing the little league game he was coaching, I put two and two together. It was already apparent that the ball game was all about winning, not so much about teaching the kids to play. The kids that could do the most to help the team won played almost exclusively... the other's mostly sat on the bench... but how would Jesus coach? Later on, the "patriotic" July 4th celebration seemed to me to basically be a war rally, complete with photos of bound, defeated Iraqis, and an Abrahms tank with a sign reading "Bush and Co." I could no more follow this church's example, than embrace the path our current administration is on.

Funny... according to the church, I'm supposed to be the head of the family, worthy of respect and obedience. This seems true to a point, as long as I'm espousing the proper religious line. As soon as I deviate from that line, my position becomes much more tenuous. I may not be a rocket scientist, but I can tell when I'm being suckered.

I think the major religions are basically competing cults... I guess you could say, I'm not exactly "main stream." I don't come even remotely close to always knowing what's right, nor do I trust those who claim they do. It's Sunday, so okay, here goes...I'll go to your church on Christmas and Easter, if you will also come to one of my choosing. I am not a reactionary Christian, I do not believe what they believe and for what it's worth, I do not like what they espouse...power, dominion, conquest, victory and all that. I believe that Jesus, Mohammed, the Buddha and all the other saviors, *probably* were men and women, very special men and women, but human, not Gods.

Organized religions are not unlike ancient cults, both are run by a priestly class and arguably both "institutions" utilize mind control and have certain characteristics found in criminal enterprises. They collect and spend the resources of their flock to proselytize and intimidate the weak, vulnerable and unaffiliated. Collectively they finance crusades all over the world in their efforts to convert. That being said, I don't think they're going away any time soon.

Their fancy talk changes, to adapt to the times, what doesn't change, is their belief that they are exclusively right and everyone else is damned or at the very least misguided. As always, many of them will do *anything* to get their way and increase their power. By the way, that doesn't mean that there isn't another side to religion, a well intentioned side that performs good works.

“Religion is for people who are afraid to go to hell...spirituality is for those who’ve been there”... Anonymous. I’d rather focus on spirituality than on religion. Being “religious” may be the lowest common denominator among God’s people. Practicing and promoting; goodness, peace and justice is the actualization of spirituality and faith in God. It is easy to say we are the former, but in the later we all miss the mark.

Here we are, blessed to live on a planet that can sustain billions of humans at a very comfortable lifestyle. Some day, the remnant will look back at what we had and say God how could we have been so stupid, greedy, arrogant and ungrateful?

When the topic of religion comes us, I’m typically; insulted, demonized and marginalized. After all, I don’t belong to an official church, so I don’t have the stamp of approval of a nationally recognized religious organization. Therefore, many people do not consider me “religious or spiritual.” While you’re in your block and metal framed church, I’m starting my Sunday in the hot tub, listening to music, news, or religious programming on the radio. I’m also likely to hear the wind rustling, the leaves falling or the birds singing. While you listen dutifully to your preacher, I may be listening critically to a “religious” radio show, or be piddling around the yard doing mundane, yet satisfying chores... perhaps stopping to scratch the dog, or jot down a note. While you mull over your expert’s message, I write my thoughts, reactions and opinions vis a vis what I have heard and felt this morning.

I do not have a spiritual community that I can meet with, although I wish I did. Instead I have to settle for the “virtual” spiritual community of the air waves and the internet. It’s not perfect, but at the moment it suits me well enough. In groups, I tend to walk on egg shells when the topic of religion comes up, speaking only occasionally on the subject to my family and friends, because I am an outcast. If I voice my opinion, I’m a jerk, fool, heretic or damned ...take your pick. Meanwhile, the pastor has my families undivided attention and their respect as he tells them what is right, *who* is wrong and how to think. No matter what I say, I’m likely to be ridiculed, attacked and called things like an unbeliever or fence sitter. You can not be a spiritually independent seeker of the true face of God these days without paying a fairly heavy price...but as always, it’s worth it!

“Be good and do no harm!”

The people of this state, are “good God fearing people” the campaign ad said and it went on to state that this candidate was the right man for the people. Pounding

home the “God fearing people” bit is an effective way to win votes, regardless of the morals of the candidate. Harping on “the fear of God”, sounds to me like an admonition to toe the line and to obey your religious leaders. They call such obedient folks “good” first, which is the carrot and then remind them to “fear God”, which IMO, is the stick. A thoughtful spiritual person might instead, respect the awesome and infinite power of God, but not dwell on fearing God. Instead one might agree with submitting to the inevitable and unchallengeable will of God. Putting the fear of God into people and frequently reminding folks to fear God, sounds like using the name of God to intimidate people, via threats, fear and curses.

I am not a reactionary Christian, so why should I go to a reactionary church? I did so, under duress, off and on for almost twenty years and I regret it. I believe the Bible contains some great truths, half truths, true history, one-sided history and a number of questionable claims.

I’ve accepted Jesus as my personal savior and I’ve been baptized, but I don’t call myself a Christian. This is because I have too many questions and moments of doubt. Just like in politics, I am an independent not a McChristian, McRepublican or McDemocrat.

I believe the bit about everyone having a God shaped hole in his or her heart. I just wonder if there’s only one religion that can fill it. One God - probably... one religion? I doubt it. Then of course there are people who deny the God shaped hole theory and maybe they’re right, at least for themselves, for most people though, we are searching for something that can fill that hole.

Are you sure you are conquering the world for Jesus? It seems to me you are most likely conquering it for McDonalds or for the investor class.

On the radio a while back an author pointed out that religious groups were instrumental in the end of slavery, the success of the civil rights movement and other good causes. He didn’t mention that these generally were not fundamentalist Christians, at least not white ones. The white fundamentalist Christians were frequently on the other side of the fight. Fight they did and fight they do, this time to destroy the Muslim people. You are with us or against us the reactionaries on both sides like to say.

You ask me if I’m a Christian and I say, I’m baptized, I’ve asked Jesus to be my personal savior and when I’m in trouble it’s his name I invoke. I also have a lot of

doubts and questions, so you tell me I'm probably not a "true" Christian. That's fine with me, because I'm not particularly interested in these labels. To me the fancy talk and labels mostly stand for power, corruption, greed and control over people. As far as organized religions, I think of one side as threatening to be-head me if I don't submit to their version of "Godliness" and the other side threatening to bomb me from the air if I don't submit to their version of the same.

I admit you do some good from time to time, and a lot of good on rare occasions, but I can't help seeing you primarily as brain washed meddlers and war mongers. You are members of competing cults bent on world domination and you will do absolutely anything to get your way.

Live and let live... that is what you say. Divide and conquer... that is what you do! Just as I consider it treachery and a scam for a political party or administration to call me unpatriotic for questioning their policies, I consider it exactly the same when a denomination calls me a heretic or worse, for questioning their authority or righteousness. Of course the playing field is uneven and they can do that, because they have the strength of human numbers... but not necessarily of God.

In religious debates, it's usually we're right, they're wrong... it's as old as the days of witch doctors, Egyptian Priests, Monks and Druid. Now its mullahs, pastors and priests ... those interpreting the "law" are as sinful as the rest of us. Presently some of the same priests who pronounce that non-annulled Catholics shouldn't take communion are pedophiles. Those parishioners that say gays shouldn't have equal rights has in some cases had abortions or committed adultery... pastors that tell us who to vote for and who to bomb are in some cases carrying on affairs with women, men or children. Mullahs, who incite young men and women to be suicide bombers, also sometimes encourage honor killings, female genital mutilation, stoning and rape as punishment.

To love one's enemies may be the ultimate wisdom and it may transcends time, but it also defies the survival instinct and I don't mind questioning it. Not discarding or refuting it, but questioning and discussing it. In my frail human mind, I see it is a beautiful "philosophy", but I don't see it practiced by those that preach it and it's not surprising that they don't. Humans have a hierarchy of loyalty, admittedly or not. We tend to put ourselves in the middle of a circle of love and concern - due, I suppose to our survival instinct and self-centeredness.

In the next concentric circle, we usually place our children, because we love them second only to ourselves, or possible as much - or more. When asked we usually

say we love them more than ourselves, but the truth is only revealed in rare life threatening situations. We certainly love them and want them to succeed, but part of it is because their success is our success. In the third concentric circle might be our spouse, who once again in conversation, we usually claim to place higher than “third place.” Next comes our other loved ones, usually immediate family members. Then come “people like us.” This might be people who are; religiously, ethnically, politically or ideologically similar. The remaining circles are comprised of groups of “other” people who are less like us, and the outmost circles are our “enemies” as defined by the state, church, family, peers or our own negative experiences. Although most people wouldn’t admit to such a hierarchy, most of us practice something a kin to it.

The enemy of my enemy is my friend, or love thy enemy... is either statement right and true? If every humanitarian act is good, then probably the later statement, from the Bible is true. How does this related to Ben Franklin’s quote? Am I being duped, if I feed, shelter and defend the rights of my antagonists? Or am I creating good Karma and doing a “good work” that will come around in a positive way?

I know people who consider my not agreeing to submit to their will, or their church’s doctrines as being unwilling to submit to God... personally, I don’t think anything could be further from the truth.

Have you ever tried to drink something that’s already spilled?

Since I don’t think that a particular “religion” is necessarily better than the others, I have trouble with them promoting violence in order to dominate others... although for the most part they won’t admit it. No matter what red Herring they use as an excuse, violence is almost always wrong and a mistake. I see organized religions as human made creations, teams if you will... but almost surely not created by or sanctioned by the all good, all powerful God of the universe. Either they’re all right, all wrong, or one is right and the rest are wrong... take your pick and please... take it outside.

Listening to the review of the new Miami Vice movie, the critic described the “movie making” as impeccable. So is our war machine... it’s impeccable, unstoppable and unchallengeable. That doesn’t make either the movie or the machine good or positive... it just means they will take a bit longer to run their course.

Something reminds me of quotes that express the opposite of the above; Chief Joseph, "I will fight no more forever"... John Lennon, "Give peace a chance", "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." We give these a bit of "lip service", but in the end, pay much less attention to them, than to the rabid purveyors of war and destruction.

I remember when Jesus freaks were just that, weirdos running around campus considered clowns by many of us. Now they not only have their own college Madrases, which is fine, they're entitled to that... but now there's also a Jesus freak *reportedly* with the IQ of a child running the country, or at least he's the front man.

I have no problem with the women I know being "religious"... not so much spiritual, but simply "religious" and tied to customs, doctrines and dogmas. Yes, there are many notable exceptions, but I think the fact that the pews are filled with women, may be telling...

What I'm disappointed about is that so many intelligent people I know, seem to have very little desire to think for themselves. They are quite unlike our founding fathers, who despite the televangelists campaigns of misinformation were men of conviction, unafraid to question, challenge or disagree with the religious establishment of the day.

Scotland 1306 - Robert the Bruce kills a rival inside a church and is excommunicated by Rome. The nobles of Scotland do not abandon Bruce and are likewise excommunicated. Apparently, the entire country is more or less excommunicated... hurray for Scotland, they stood up to "the church." Then, I suppose, like Henry VIII, they started one of their own!

My wife and I were talking "around" religion and she said, "I don't even know where you stand." I advised her that I believed in God most of the time and she replied, "that's not much, most people do." I felt pressured to make a stronger statement, so I said that I had been baptized and accepted Jesus as my personal savior a long time ago and that I had no plans to renounce that. "That's good to know she said." I could have gone on about renouncing organized religion, but she probably knows that. I thought later I might have made more of a stand about my disgust with churches and their seeming desire to send all the heathens to "kingdom come" if they won't repent and join the right team... but on this rare occasion, better judgment prevailed and I kept my mouth shut.. In the back

ground I can hear Vart skall min kärlek föra, which is the Swedish of “I don’t know how to love him” from Jesus Christ superstar.

Chapter – Eleven

Humans have always seen explosions... volcanic eruptions, lighting strikes etc... it's no wonder that prophecy draws heavily on “fire from the sky.”

The American system is definitely better than those systems that don't allow their subjects to read the Bible or other foreign holy books. I wonder though.. what percentage of Americans have ever read a “foreign” holy book and what is the percentage of people in other countries that have done the same? I'm guessing that in both cases, it's very low. In many societies, the people are discouraged either by law, tradition or peer pressure to explore “foreign” religions.

They go to church while I stay home... we both think the other is wasting their time... or worse... guess who society judges more harshly.

They try to pin you down... are you a Christian? I was baptized and asked Jesus to be my personal savior, he's who I pray to when I'm in trouble... beyond that I don't give a hoot about labels. I respect people who believe in religion and people who don't... I also don't go around telling them they're going to hell if they don't believe this, that or the other thing. I agree with the old gal who said that all the particulars of religion, are “a tempest in a teapot.”

The lords prayer, the serenity prayer and "thy will be done"... these three are pretty helpful.

"Religion is arrogance masking as humility"... Bill Maher.

Yes... we have freedom of religion, and we seem intent on spreading it around the world. That's one of the “reasons” we're trying to “liberate” the Muslims... As far as I “know” they have little in the way of religious freedom... although most Muslim nations historically had and continue to have relatively prosperous, practicing Christian and Jewish populations. Meanwhile, we support, prop up and arm Saudi Arabia, which is probably the most religiously intolerant of the Muslim nations.

Getting back to our religious freedom... arguably you face discrimination in the US, unless you belong to one of the major religions. We've had only one non-protestant president and other than people of the Jewish faith... how many other

religions are represented in our congress and senate?

Who is more likely to be “acceptable” to God... of course I don’t know, but I don’t think it’s wrong to discuss the question... is it the mentally defective who commit crimes, or those who are mentally intact and commit them?

They recently arrested the polygamist leader of a fundamentalist sect in Utah or Texas, but I can’t remember his name. The charges include rape and I think welfare fraud. He had the “sects” young men doing construction work and the church would keep all the money... because the young men weren’t officially receiving a paycheck, it’s alleged that their families collected welfare.

The sect’s leader also reportedly married thirteen year old girls... I am completely opposed to that brand of polygamy... it involves child abuse, mind control and welfare fraud. I'm not opposed to a man or a woman having a “plural” marriage if they are above the age of 21 and competent to make such a decision.

Am I a Christian? According to most churches’ criteria I probably don't qualify.

The a lady at the church seminar had written a book about her son who'd been in the military. He later killed a man in cold blood and everyone was shocked. If you teach people to kill, they may commit violence at slightly higher rates than the rest of society... After all, they’ve been taught that there’s a “time to kill” and they times they decide to do it, will not always be “appropriate.” They’ve been taught them that life is cheap and that they can be the judge, jury and executioner... so what do you expect to happen!

If you are really a Christian can you forgive Bin Laden? I know you say you want justice, but I wonder if you’re mostly out for revenge... or do you just want him to repent. You want to kill “them.” You want terrorism to stop, yet the west has been occupying their lands for 200 years and you are still trying to crush them under your heel. If you are a true Christian, perhaps you should try to “change” them by your example and not with bombs. As far as I can tell, you guys are Old Testament not new.

Some of the angst and unhappiness that America is try to smother with, pills, alcohol, conspicuous consumption and organized religion may be rooted in the fact that many of us are uncomfortable with our role of world police and with the death and destruction we wreak on others. No matter what rhetoric or nonsense you

cloak these actions in, we are killing innocent people with the bombs that only real monsters deserve.

Some say trust in God and others say trust in God and keep your powder dry... the former claims the latter is un-necessary if you abide by their slogan.

Last Sunday we went to the Easter service at a friends church... as usual I couldn't contain myself and had to write down some thoughts during the service. Now I can't find the paper, so where do I begin? The slick smooth talking pastor played to his audience as most religious demagogues do, (oops, I meant to say religious leaders) and I couldn't help but picture him with a mullet haircut and a beer. In this town, we see lots of mullets, lots of beer and when push comes to shove these Joe six packers are likely to fall in line and heed the master's... I mean pastors call. This cleric is not as belligerent as some mullahs, but his subtle and carefully crafted message is just as blood thirsty in the final analysis. Like the mullahs and imams, he is all about; power, control, conquest and dominion, despite the sweet psychology and his appealing arguments about eternal life and saving souls.

My son was wondering why we can't just live together and stop all this fighting over religion? I think it has something to do with territory as well as religion. A basic tenant of economics is scarcity and the scarcer the good land, the more "religious" people seem to get. God and religion are often just the excuses used to pick up prime real estate from the "heathens." Peace is still the best way... although it's the path less traveled by our species. Just like any other treasure, a decent piece of land is "yours", only until you die, or until some one wrests it away from you. It may be wrested away by; the tax man, your neighbor, spouse, the law or a foreign invader - we have but a fleeting grip on anything of "value." We are at most the "tax payer of record", or mortgage holder for a while.

In his 9.11 fifth year anniversary speeches, GW mentioned that he sensed a third "awakening" beginning in the USA... God help us if we awaken anymore than we already have, at least along his lines of thought.

The message of Christianity is so beautiful and the message of Islam is so realistic. Islam seems to be a reaction to the failure of people to adhere to the tenants of new Testament Christianity, as well as a progression beyond the pagan religious practices that still hung on in the Arabian peninsula in the seventh century. Islam offered practical approaches to the problems and challenges that the Arabs faced during that period of history. Christianity and Judaism were food for thought, but since the Arabs were in competition with Christians and Jews, those religions may

have seemed to them as usurpers. The Arabs also must have noticed that their Judeo Christian neighbors often didn't practice what they preached... so it's no surprise that they fleshed out their own religion. In the final - or at least current analysis, Islam seems to work no better, or worse than Christianity and Judaism.

I am grateful for the right to criticize our religious and political leaders, although I believe there are sanctions against protesting to loudly... even here. If I were in any number of Islamic countries, I would probably be too fearful to protest... It is the wall of separation between church and state in the west that allows us to have freedom of speech... God help us to preserve it! (Is that a contradiction?) In the Islamic world that wall is weak or almost non-existent in some cases, making freedom of speech a scarce commodity... not that I consider western religious leaders to have nurtured freedom of speech, except in cases where it benefited them. For the most part they have been obstacles and impediments to freedom of speech. To this day the fundamentalist churches would most likely control the press and promote burning the words, if not the flesh of whoever they deem a heretic, just as they did to the Gnostics and "heretics" during their numerous inquisitions and witch hunts.

I note an anti-conservation movement in our country, it's been here since the beginning and has always challenged the forces of conservation and good stewardship. I think it has to do with *manifest destiny* and our historic embracing of machismo and militarism. We are lead to believe that if there's something we want, we are more or less entitled to take it ... one way or another. It goes along with the prosperity gospel that is preached from many of our most influential pulpits. We are "charged" with the job of conquering the land, subduing the wilderness, converting the heathens and getting rich in the process!

Religion? Spirituality? Live, let live, harm no one except in true cases of self defense... that's good enough for me.

I believe in... the quest, the search and the process. I hope to find answers to the questions I have, and in the process to raise new questions that might encourage others to think. The questions that are intriguing me now, may pale in comparison to others that come along later. I will arrive at my final destination some day and possibly learn a few things ... they say I'll be punished, or rewarded. That may be inevitable, but it's not so urgent to me now, after all, the timing of such things is not in our hands.

I have told my children they will discuss religion and politics with lots of different

people, some will be “measured” in their arguments, others will be passionate, and a few will be too angry or self-righteous to even have a discussion with.

I accept some aspects of all the major religions and reject other aspects of their creeds and dogmas. They are like men and women, neither all good nor all bad. IMO the religions were all created by people, possibly with Gods inspiration or consent, possibly without it. People have been trying to “encapsulate” God since time immemorial. What they keep coming up with is an imperfect pill, but one that is widely swallowed none the less. How can I not... at least occasionally, question the existence of God? Have you not seen what is going on around us and what has been going on since the beginning of time? Your words that the “devil made the bad guy do it” sound a tad empty at this point.

My friend pointed out that the Tsunami had primarily hit non-Christian nations, it was an obvious observation, one which must have occurred to many people. Some may have found some satisfaction in that realization, I doubt that my friend is of that ilk. I mentioned hearing a report that a Christian fishing village had also been decimated and that certainly many Christians had died as well. He countered with something about inevitability and that the fact remained that non-Christian nations had suffered the worst. I wondered out loud if the Christians who died were “bad Christians”, or was the God of the Bible unable to make a “surgical” strike that would only take out “heathens”... heck even the air force claims to have that ability.

Some people may find comfort or validation in the fact that the vast majority of the tsunami’s victims were “heathens.” It might even reinforce their belief in the righteousness of their faith versus the others. Maybe it made them feel more comfortable with our current crusade in the Middle East? After all, many westerners have been taught that only “Christians” are part of the kingdom of the God, and that those “poor heathen devils” are all going to hell anyway?

Meanwhile, across the disaster zone, millions of injured and displaced survivors are finding solace in their own faiths and rituals ... but an increasing number of them might give Christianity a first or second look.

The US was criticized for pledging too little for tsunami relief, then it pledged a little more and a week later came to the plate more generously, offering \$350 million. Then they were trumped by Japan’s pledge of \$ 500 million and it made me wonder... is this a bidding war? Meanwhile the Arab nations were fairly quiet,

with most of them pledging very little... at least as far as I know. Of course one of the richest Arab nations is currently being taken apart piece by piece, via the USA's expenditure of hundred billion to "liberate" it.

Are the hundreds of thousands killed by the tsunami mostly destined for eternal damnation because they were not "saved" or "born again?" I wonder, doubt, wrestle and pray for answers, but I do not know ... some people say they do know and I'm especially wary of them. What's this life for anyway?

Can we stop calling each others faiths gutter religions, or evil. Despite all the self righteousness, I don't think that any have been proven beyond a "reasonable doubt", to be more legitimate than others. The angels you claim to talk to may also talk to people of other faiths, or they may only be in your head.

If the major religions can't agree to accept and respect each others right to worship as they choose, how can there be much hope for peace? Go ahead and say you're "righteous" and your neighbor is damned... (for what it's worth, I think it's a stupid.) Just don't raise your hand against each other, except to protect the life and liberty of everyone. Stop attacking people half way around the world to "liberate" them, instead, focus on the rats, in your own towns. There are plenty of pedophiles, muggers and other violent criminals in our own country to get rid of... unfortunately they are sometimes in our own homes, schools and churches.

What would Jesus think about diversity... I guess the current "train of thought" is that he would be for the "melting pot" approach... but who knows?

Why were the Jews "chosen" and who chose them? Maybe they were selected to manage the goyum, because someone considered them bright enough to do the job. Were there fiery chariots that descended from the heavens and made contact with the Hebrew patriarchs? Doesn't the bible mention flying wheels or disks? Would alien visitors want to be seen, with their bulging eyes and bean heads, or would they choose to speak from behind fiery bushes and out of the mouths of donkeys? Maybe they were ventriloquists! Who was Jesus' father? About all feel comfortable in accepting is that it wasn't Joseph. Was Mary artificially inseminated? Was his father a Roman centurion, or some other unacceptable man as certain traditions suggest? Was Jesus married to, or especially close to Mary Magdalene? There are lots of "related" questions that could be posed, and very few "good" answers forthcoming!

I don't say "for Christ's sake" but I do say "for God's sake" although for a while I was saying "for goodness sakes" which sounds pretty silly to me. I avoid saying "for Christ's sake", because it offends folks, but I certainly think I have the right to say that or "for God's sake." Regarding people accusing me of using the Lord's name in vain, I say mind your own business. That's not my intention and I think they 're being over sensitive, legalistic, overly analytical and sticking their noses where they don't belong. Actually even saying "God #*&\$ it" doesn't bother me as much as the thought police would like for it to. I agree we shouldn't be going around asking God to damn things... but neither do I think people actually mean it. It's kind of like the other almost "involuntary" expletives we use... they're mostly "just" an effective way of letting off steam.

I am anti-Taliban and anti-fundamentalist Christian, when either of these camps deprive others of fundamental human rights – which both of them do more often than some would like to admit. I have to agree that the Taliban takes the cake as far as cruelty and sadism, but when our "conservatives" push for harsh drug laws leading to the incarceration and rape of many thousands of young people... I wonder how much more civilized we really are? Those of use who desire to live in peace, and not be deprived of my fundamental rights, are threatened by both kinds of extremists. The Taliban may be more blatantly vile and violent, but it seems to me that both of these groups will gladly use violence to impose their will. I am for peace and order – but a natural and just order. Not ones that are self righteously *proclaimed* as being from God, but actually created by men and women

I am an "independent" and believe it to be a valid category -- entirely different than your "with us or against us" categories. I don't know *for sure* if Jesus rose from the dead... however, I have still asked him to be my savior. – although many tell me that I'm asking in vain. I pray to Jesus and to God when I'm in trouble and don't accept the current dominant state religion. I think religion is good sometimes, but just as often, it seems to be the dark underbelly of spirituality. Religions like governments, can be the protectors, or the deniers of freedom and now as so often throughout history, neither seems to be doing such a great job.

There may be nothing as difficult to discuss in a civilized manner as religion. Even among best friends or family members, it can result in anger and derision. Jesus wasn't kidding when he said something about having to leave your mother and father behind, if you follow him. It's the same today, if you choosing a religion or spirituality that differs from that of you loved ones, you may have to leave them behind.

My next door neighbor and I are of different religions persuasions and so far we have gotten along fine. As long as one of us doesn't decide that God has "given" us the other ones land, there's a good chance we'll continue to coexist peacefully and even be friends.

As far as I'm concerned, some of our local church might as well be Madrasses. They preach the same intolerance as the mullahs, although they frame it in terms of trying to save your soul... of course they won't blow *you* up, but they're quite likely to support blowing up people in the Madras. Just as mosques harbor intolerant "elements", churches do as well... in either case, the more fundamentalist and self-righteous they are, the more intolerant they tend to be.

Saviors, prophets?... I see it as humankind's business as usual -- one step forward two steps back -- or sometimes the other way around. Some people are genuinely trying to do good things, others are simply lusting for power -- the majority of us, just trudge along, trying to survive and trying not to fall down and get stepped on. Eventually we wear out, or give up and accept that the time has come to be put in the ground for some well deserved "rest." Meanwhile those around us alternately love us... or put the squeeze on, to get a few more miles out of us... and vice versa.

For those that say I believe in no absolutes, here's the short list... all of which you're probably familiar with. Thou shall not murder, rape or steal...

When we look up at the stars in the sky maybe we're seeing the promised land... and for the most part, maybe it still unoccupied.

Organized religion *is* the dark underbelly of spirituality... it's what happens when TPTB co-opt humankind's quest for answers about life, death and the hereafter.

I think the Bell curve applies to everything from fundamentalist Christians to fundamentalist Muslims. In either case, at one end of the curve, you have peaceful people and at the other end, fanatic hate mongers. You can argue about which religion has more of each, but when you look at the record, neither side is doing that great. Both of these "great" religions, have been almost equally violent... who has killed more people over the centuries? Although that doesn't tell the whole story, it tells you that they both have missed the mark repeatedly, incredibly and horribly.

You say God gave you the promised land and so far, he seems to have been on your side, granting you victory after miraculous victory over the "Godless heathens"

you are constantly “cleansing” from the land. It seems that neither you nor God has given them permission to be there... or at least that’s what everyone around here believes. Moses heard from a voice in a bush that he held title to the Philistines and Canaanites lands... why am I not surprised that they didn’t believe him?

It seems that both sides are asking their people to fight a religious war – isn’t that supposed to be one of the things our ancestors came here to get away from?

It’s getting more and more difficult to discuss politics or religion with my buddies – this stems from the fact, that they believe God was talking to Moses from that bush ... while I think he might’ve been talking to someone else... maybe even to himself.

Unitarian, Christian, Muslim, Sunni... in a way aren’t they are all just labels? Are we going to beat each other over the heads with our “holy” books forever? That sounds a lot like not seeing the forest for the trees.

Okay... I’ll go to the Christmas service with her, I certainly don’t want her to be alone, possibly in tears.

I think that all religions, tends to be contra-phobic -- they are at the “very least” suspicious of other faiths. I’m not trying to pick on any particular group, although some of them have more resources at their disposal, allowing them to achieve or “mischieve” more than their competition.

Describing people as being people of the book, or not people of the book, seems to be a way of elevating one’s self and excluding others. How is that productive in helping people to get along with each other?

Would I lay down my life for this, that or the other thing? I might lay it down for a thing or two, just not the “thing or two” you’re telling me to kill, or be killed for. In the greater scheme of things, we’re only here for a fleeting moment and maybe it is nobler to erupt like a roman candle for a good cause, than to grow decrepit pursuing nothing but cake and other goodies. Of course a lot of people work hard just to survive and I tip my hat to them. That still leaves a lot of room for discussion and hopefully for freedom of choice in these rather “weighty” matters.

When you say, “my people” have fought valiantly for America on many occasions, so you should be willing to fight for our rights... I’ll think to myself - maybe,

maybe not. I see you as being willing to fight for your interests, just like everyone else... I'm not sure that's fighting for America, but even if it is, it doesn't mean it's *automatically* right. I also see you as being quite willing to fight for the highest bidder or for the spoils of war... I'm not impressed.

The violent aspect of our society has yet to run its course, but that doesn't mean it won't... the same goes for violent religions and ideologies... The sooner they run their course, the better!

November 2006, the wives of the deceased Iraqi war vet and a Korean war vet, were lobbying the Defense Department for the right to put a Wicca star on their husband's military tombstones, since that is the religion they identified with. So far, their request has been denied, but it is being reviewed... Will freedom of religion prevail? Or do you have to be one of the major, "genuine" faiths to be allowed such rights?

Richard Dawkins, an atheist, has written The God Delusion published by Houghton Mifflin books. One story he relates, is a study done with Israeli schoolchildren... one group is asked if it was moral for Joshua to "ethnically cleanse" the ancient holy land of entire tribes of people. Under this "Joshua scenario", the vast majority of the Israeli youngsters said it was moral, and okay to have done it. Another group of Israeli schoolchildren was given a similar scenario, but this time, the name Joshua was changed to General Lynn, and instead of being in ancient Palestine, it was in China. This time the ethnic cleansing and genocide was overwhelmingly deemed wrong and inappropriate... humm.

An accomplished Indian physicist and writer, was being interviewed on the radio recently. The interviewer, asked him about the fact that in Hinduism, there are so many gods... and asked if he could explain that in light of his scientific background. He says the gods are kind of like songs... everyone has a favorite one. Unlike the monotheistic religions, where you are commanded to obey only one God with dire consequences if you don't, Hinduism, he explained is quite different. Hinduism also has no known origination point in time, it is also the oldest religion still widely practiced and has about one billion followers.

He also had the decency to point out that Hindu culture is not perfect and pointed out the inherent "problems" with the caste system. I've also heard that wives are sometimes burned to death by their husbands to "get rid of them." Christianity has no caste system, although it has, at times, been interpreted to allow a class system and even slavery.

The Indian physicist then explained the meanings of the words karma and Dharma. Karma, he said is “what we do” and Dharma is “what we are expected to do”... silly me, I thought Dharma was just a cute gal on TV. Dharma has also been translated as “duty” and an ethical framework. Some Dharmic principles include; mercy, temperance, adherence to logic, pursuit of knowledge, respect for one's parents, pursuit of the truth and not getting angry. The man implied that the pursuit of truth is the most essential of these principles.

Karma on the other hand is a metaphysical concept, which is the Hindu answer to the problem of evil. The Hindus say that evil in the form of suffering, is a consequence of one's own actions. Any action that has a negative effect on yourself or others, we'll come back and “bite” you. This, when tied to reincarnation, which the Hindus also believe in, means that ultimately we are responsible for our actions. If there is not justice in this life, there will justice be in the “next” life for evildoers. So in Hinduism... I guess you really can't expect to get away with murder.

The guest stated, that Karma and Dharma make the individual take responsibility for his own actions instead of allowing one to “point fingers” or blame someone else. The Hindus don't claim to have the answer to post mortal existence in a religious marketing arena, putting them at a disadvantage compared to those religions that spell it all out. I’m “put off” a bit by the dogma of Christianity that says - all you have to do, is sincerely repent for anything wrong that you’ve done and as long as you do that and “join the team” all is forgiven and forgotten. I wonder if I’m turning a little bit Hindu? Meanwhile, Christians seem to be taught almost “unequivocally” that the folks on the other side of the “divide” are going to hell, even if they're leading decent lives... even if they’ve never heard of Jesus. This dovetails nicely with the churches efforts to “save” the heathens and it’s record of killing them all and letting God sort them out when they don’t submit. After all, don’t you just have to “repent” and everything will be forgiven?

Chapter – Twelve

Here's a truck stop instead of St. Peter's (R.E.M.) ... here's a Hindu temple instead of St. Mark's.

The great monotheistic religions have so many absolutes ultimatums and heinous punishments for transgressors and outsiders. There is a story about the man gathering firewood on the Sabbath, the Hebrews asked God what to do about him and God says to stone him to death... did the man have a wife and children depending on him? I guess that if he did, Yahweh knew what was best and perhaps had somebody waiting in the wings -- perhaps a better man, to take care of man's family if he had one. I think Jesus said he was not here to change or contradict the Old Testament... when I hear stories like the one above, I think it's a shame... no, actually I think there's something fishy going on.

Why shouldn't religion be a quest for knowledge, salvation or enlightenment instead of "commandments", which I think are from other people, more than from God. It seems to me that the church and its edicts have been shaped and framed by the elite... the powerful.

In 325 AD, the "First Council of Nicaea", was in held in Nicea, which is in the present day country of Turkey. Reportedly, the powerful Romman Emperor Constantine wouldn't let the "Christian bishops" leave the city, until they came up with a "canon" of what was "God's word." They bishops voted on what was God's word and the loosing points of view, such as those of Arius, were declared heretical and over the next generation or so, the "heretical" books that proposed anything contrary to the Nicean council's views were collected and burned.

Fortunately, copies of several of these "heretical" books survived, the best know of these is The Gospel of Thomas which was found at Nag Hammadi, Egypt in 1945. In this small city, thirteen leather-bound papyrus codices, containing about 50 primarily "Gnostic" treatises, were discovered by local peasants. This "forbidden library" is believed to have been secreted away by monks from th monastery of St Pachomius, who for whatever reason didn't want the these "heretical" texts to be destroyed.

As far as finding absolute answers to everything, perhaps that can be a hope for that, in the great beyond... but of course we all want to know these things during

our lifetime -- we all seem to want “afterlife insurance” and we are excellent, potential customers for the salesman of that product.

Are human beings basically decent or basically centers... I suppose were little above. Going back to the Bell curve, there are people at the extreme ends. But most of us tread along the bell curve as if it were a tightrope.

Heaven? ... Surely its wireless... all the cable modems are sent down “there.” If heaven is wireless and all the cable based devices have long since been sent to users in hell... my house must be in limbo. I have given up for the time being on being wireless, we just couldn’t achieve a reliable enough level of connectivity.

On the book review channel, they’re interviewing the author of a book on the Gospel of Judas Iscariot. He says that in the first two centuries AD, there were many diverse strains of Christianity... Constantine and the boys took care of most of them... book burning were all the rage back then, fortunately a few copies survived... as mentioned above.

My wife, who I love and respect, currently donates \$ 300 per month to the local church... and she’d probably like to donate more. On the other hand, I consider them the local mafia and would prefer not to give them any money for their war rallies etc. Unfortunately (for me anyway), this doesn’t seem to be an option ... I am already a bit of an outcast. When I complained to her about it, I was first told it was her money, but then, she gave me the option of vetoing her donations of “our” money to the church... I decided the downside of voicing such a veto would be far costlier than the \$ 300 per month she was investing in the venerable institution and kept my mouth shut... but not “joyfully.” It just another reason that I’d prefer to have separate accounts and assets, based on each of our production, savings and investments... fat chance of that... we are truly joined at the hip and at the bank and any talk about being in control of one’s own productivity seems to be blasphemy!

Israel is the ultimate sacred cow, Americans who criticize it or verbally attack its policies are marginalized, crushed, or at the very least ignored.

If I was born in the Arab world, I’d probably be marginally a Muslim and call Mohammed my profit and Savior. I need a Savior as much as any other man... I’m not strong enough to do things on my own – but I also tend to question things at *least* as much as the average fellow and to have my doubts from time to time.

The Muslims accept Jesus as a prophet and Mary as a virgin who gave birth. Someone protesting the pope's visit to Turkey in 2006, held up a sign stating that the Muslims accept Jesus as a prophet and asking - why won't the Christians accept their prophet Mohamed? Someone needs to tell the poor fellow, that's just not how it works... Christianity is quite clear about its "exclusivity" it's Jesus and Jesus alone.

What could be scarier than being told that - if you question the Church's authority, you will burn in hell forever, and what could be more appealing than being told that if you "submit" and join the team, you will have everlasting life... what better way to keep the troops in line! We are told not to be a doubting Thomas... we are supposed to be convinced, excited and have no reservations whatsoever.

Lately I believe more and more, in dharma and karma and less and less in simply being able to "repent" be forgiven and be unaccountable for one's actions. I know it's up to God, and I know "he" knows if one's repentance is real or imagined, but at the moment I'm having a little difficulty believing this dictate of Christianity. The ancient Egyptians believed that upon death, a person's heart, would be weighed on a scale, and it had to be lighter than a feather for us not to be devoured by a crocodile headed monster - interesting... I love the idea of forgiveness, but I also like the idea of accountability! The fact that you can repent, join the team, *and* be more or less unaccountable for your crimes or misdeeds, seems like more of a recruiting tool than anything else.

I believe that we are all, at least at times - sinners hypocrites and liars... whether or not we admit, or realize it... I think we are those things. That's certainly not an original thought... it's just something I agree with. Whether were "sinning" for survival, pleasure or gain, I think we're all "guilty."

Missionaries are not allowed in many Muslim countries and there are restrictions on proselytizing in a number of non-Muslim countries as well. Over here, we have almost complete religious freedom. In response to the lack of it in places like Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan, should we discriminate against Muslims or should we maintain our strict policy of religious freedom? I hope we allow even more religious freedom... within bounds of decency etc., and let our example shine through to them. As far as invading them to change them, I see that as counterproductive.

I recently heard a national guardsmen serving in Afghanistan being interviewed on the radio. One thing he said is that packs of wild dogs can be quite a problem for American forces and sometimes, the soldiers shoot them. He stated that it was interesting (or something) that the people he relates this to, are more disturbed about soldiers shooting dogs than they are about him shooting the Taliban... why is he surprised?

The fundamentalists that I *think* I know, on both sides of the divide, seem to be among the most loving people imaginable -- they also "seem" to have among the itchiest trigger fingers.

The world's "great" religions... if they are *not* personality cults, then I don't know *what* is. All this stuff about direct lines to God and exclusiveness of their religion strikes me as the presumptuous, arrogance of power... the church craves power and each of us craves security... the two go hand in hand. There seems to be very little actual humility involved, despite all the fancy talk.

You call me a hypocrite, and I have to admit that I am. Meanwhile, I *think* I am surrounded by other hypocrites, who will just not admit it. Although a few people I know admit to being hypocrites at times, others don't, instead they refer to each other as the "saints."

Whether they very ceremoniously put you in a hole, or you're eaten by; birds, dogs, worms, ants or just gather flies -- what does it matter? I think the ceremony is mostly for those who are left behind... hopefully by then, our souls are far from the "scene of the crime." The fancy funerals may add to one's "legacy", and the lack of a respectable funeral may be pointed out to marginalize others... but I seriously doubt that our souls reside in those holes.

A couple of days ago I brought up the issue of my dear wife giving \$300 a month to her church. She advised me that she worked hard and it's her money... funny how usually it's our money, but in this case -- she referred to it as *her* money. I've decided finally, there's nothing that I can do about it... we signed up for "better, or for worse." She explained to me, that her donations are her way of investing and pointed out that she doesn't question my investments. Despite certain misgivings, I have to respect her wishes -- I won't bother mentioning my fear of repercussions *if* I were to push the issue. This, in spite of her saying that although she feels strongly about the donations, she would go along with any decision I might care to make on this matter... she is a master of psychology! If I made the wrong decision, I would be a dead man.

The Christmas tree is up... I helped with the basic raising and stringing of lights and now the gals are decorating it in earnest. My wife attended a Christmas tree decorating class and they learned how to decorate a “theme tree.” One thing it has that I’m seeing for the first time, are “boom booms”... they look like large clumps of red berries, frosted with plastic ice.

Regarding people claiming to have a direct line to God, I hope they're joking... it may be well intentioned, but I find it a somewhat surprising “claim” coming from otherwise modest people. I hate to say it, but when one belongs to the dominant church, they seem to feel powerful and emboldened. Hopefully it’s primarily a “compliment” bestowed on others, as the people I’m thinking of, don’t so much claim to personally have the “direct line” as much as saying so and so has it.

I hate to be such a cynic, as the miracles of the Bible may very well be possible, but what does supernatural mean anyway? Could it be that God and his angels just have far more advanced technology than us? Couldn’t that explain the virgin birth, resurrection and everything else? Or is it an insult to God to lower “his” power to the level of “technology”, as if his miracles are cheap parlor tricks?

As far as professing one’s faith “publicly”, I’m don’t mind professing my “faith” to family and perhaps some friends, but I wouldn’t want to banter with the “authorities” about which things on their “list” I profess to and which I may not... For their part, they care, don’t care, or inform me that it’s not “them” we’re obeying by professing our faith. It’s God they say, through Jesus his son, that these requirements have come to light.

For the time being and perhaps always, I’ll take my chances with God... and count you as too trigger happy to spend much time listening to. Yes, I’m “making my bed” and will have to lie in it, but behind the Cheshire cat grins, you guys seem more like hungry lions, than “lambs of God.” Your churches, mosques, temples etc., seem to me, to be a threat to life, limb, property and freedom... not the guarantor of anything good.

I have a sneaking suspicion that the founding fathers would not be aficionados of the TV evangelists... and vice versa.

Do people have the “right” to believe they are chosen over the rest of humanity and is there a place for them? Well, I certainly think they have the right to believe that. I’m more skeptical about such folks having the right to act out that belief and

I thoroughly believe that we are fools if we let them. On the other hand, maybe they're right about the whole goyum thing.

The great churches and mosques and temples are indeed awe-inspiring, but they pale in comparison to the Teton, Himalayas, Alps or Andes.

There are undoubtedly violently radical Muslims... and I hear them justifiably criticized on the news... frequently. There are also, I believe violent radical Christians... but I can't think of the last time I've heard them verbally beat up on.

I have no problem with people having strong religious beliefs... it's when they persecute others who don't share them that I get antsy.

How would the many now defunct religions have evolved, if they had survived? I'm thinking of the Druids, the Vikings and others. Will the current crop of dominant religions/cults, survive, evolve, increase their market share... or might "moral bankruptcy" lead to their demise? Will they destroy each other, or learn to coexist peacefully, as they have occasionally done in the past. Will the future be one of cooperation or conflict between these powerful institutions.

I'm not sure, but Christianity seems to appeal, even more to women than it does to men, while Islam may appeal more to men, than to women. I'm basing this on my non-scientific observation of who fills the pews and mosques, as well as my amateur analysis of what each religion offers to the different sexes.

The Christian CEO boasted that about "400 souls had been saved" by his "Christian" business policies... that's what modern Christianity seems to be about – numbers and dollars,

It's as difficult for the Muslims to convert to Christianity as vice versa. For me, either move would be possible, as I've been somewhere between the two worlds all my life... for those "born" into either faith, their loyalty is more visceral.

I wonder if ultral-extremism and "final solutions" are prohibited by God... maybe that's why grand alliances like that of WWII, come together in the worst of times, to "save the day."

Does God hear an atheist's prayer? God's omnipotent, so surely, he hears them, but does he answer the atheist's "prayer?" I'm not an atheist, but I hope he

answers atheist's... if and when they pray. Pray, meditate, contemplate, hope... I think they're all intertwined anyway.

We went to our McChurch for the Christmas eve candle light service and afterwards everyone seemed pleased that the service was "short and sweet." I kind of felt like I'd just eaten at a McDonalds... and you know how "good" their food is... the service filled me with about the same amount of food for thought.

I have no problem believing that God is present wherever two or more gather in his name, but I seriously wonder if these McChurches are truly God's abode. Since God is said to be omnipotent... maybe he's "there" when solitary men or women contemplate God. The bit about God being present when two or more gather in "his" name, might just be another way of "encouraging" us to go someplace, where we can be held "accountable" for our beliefs. I don't think these McChurches are necessarily God's abode, any more than a McDonalds is a fine restaurant.

The pastor suggested that the congregation look at Christmas in a childlike manner and there's anything wrong with that... in the end, however, I think it's even better to look at things like adults. Looking at things like children seems to me to be a good formula for being mislead and manipulated.

What did Jesus say? Apparently he said many things... but most of what we know of his "sayings" are what the emperor Constantine and his cronies wanted us to hear... the rest they did a "nice" job of suppressing... fortunately they weren't as successful as they thought.

- end -

About the Author



KW Ibrahim, who founded the Society for the Rational Study of Religion almost a decade ago, was born in the USA in the 1950s and grew up within sight of the World Trade Center. His father who was born in Egypt, came to the US on a scholarship at the age of 21 where he earned a PhD in engineering.

KWs mother is from the heartland and traces her family back to men who fought in the Revolutionary War as well as to steadfast pioneer women.

Throughout his life and travels to; Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Australia, Mexico, Canada and the Caribbean, KW has sought to learn about different religions - their roots and relationships to each other.

KW has written several books, including Marriage Vows 2000 and Opus Oil, which focuses on America and the Middle East.

